

ENTIRE ABSOLUTION OF THE PENITENT.

A S E R M O N,

MOSTLY PREACHED

BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY,

IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF CHRIST, IN OXFORD,

ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

BY THE
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P R E F A C E.

THE writer of the present Sermon has already stated, in the course of it, what was not, as well as what was, his object ; yet it may possibly save some misunderstanding, here to restate it. Its object is, the relief of individual penitents. Consciences *are* burdened. There is a provision, on the part of God, in His Church, to relieve them. They wish to be, and to know that they are, in a state of grace. God has provided a means, however deeply any have fallen, to replace them in it. They feel that they cannot take off their own burden, loose the chains of their past sins, and set themselves free to serve God. They look for some act out of themselves, if there be one, which shall do this. God has provided it. They want something to sever between past and future, that they may begin anew. By His absolving sentence, God does efface the past. They cannot estimate their own repentance and faith. He has provided Physicians of the soul, to relieve and judge for those who "open their griefs" to them. They wish to know how to overcome besetting temptations ; God has provided those, experienced in the sad history of man's sins and sorrows, who can tell them how others, through the grace of God, have overcome them.

Such are the cases to which the Church of which we are members, most directly applies the remedy of private Absolution, cases of heavy sin, or of timorous, scrupulous consciences; and this, either previous to the Holy Communion, or at the hour of death. There is a deep instinctive feeling, by which the soul (unless warped by human systems) does long to lay open any oppressive sin, before it comes into the presence of its Judge. Persons, who for a long period of life have carried about them the oppressive consciousness of some past, secret, sin, cannot bear it then; those who could not bring themselves to endure the pain and shame of confession in life, still often could not bear the thought of carrying their sin with them, unconfessed, into the very Presence of God. "They," says Hooker¹, "which during life and health, are never destitute of ways to delude repentance, do, notwithstanding, oftentimes, when their last hour draweth on, both feel that sting which before lay dead in them, and also thirst after such helps as have always till then been unsavoury." People have, through years of life, purposed to confess (if God enable them) at their death. But what instinctive reverence for Almighty God tells them should be done before death, should, if possible, be done in life. And so souls of the more earnest sort desire to undergo present pain, that they may obtain not forgiveness only, but enlarged grace and increased strength

¹ On "Private Confession and Absolution with us," bk. vi. 4. 15.

against evil, and so the fuller favour of Almighty God.

And this is obviously the more necessary, in sad cases of relapse, where the will is good but weak, and evil habits strong; and men break off a habit for awhile perhaps, and then are overtaken by it, and then perhaps despond, and give themselves up to it, or give up other good habits, as though all were lost.

And, in bad cases of relapse, a person cannot or ought not, without repentance proportionate, to go to the Holy Communion "with a quiet conscience." And so our Church, in her two exhortations, both warns us of the peril of "those who will presume to receive it unworthily," and if we are alarmed by her warnings, directs us how to find relief; which, doubtless, she intended also to encourage by the direction², that "those who intend to be partakers of the Holy Communion shall signify their names to the Curate, at least some time the day before." "Because," says Hooker³, "there are but few that consider how much that part of Divine service, which consisteth in partaking the holy Eucharist, doth import their souls; what they lose by neglect thereof, and what by devout practice they might attain unto; therefore, lest carelessness of general confession should, as commonly it doth, extinguish all remorse of men's particular enormous crimes, our custom (whensoever men present themselves at the Lord's

² Rubric at the beginning of the Communion Service.

³ Loc. cit.

Table) is, solemnly to give them very fearful admonition, what woes are perpendicularly hanging over the heads of such as dare adventure to put forth their unworthy hands to those admirable mysteries of life, which have by rare examples been proved conduits of irremediable death to impenitent receivers; whom, therefore, as we repel being known, so being not known we terrify."

Again, let it be considered whether, among many blessed death-beds, which God has vouchsafed to us to see, this be not one chief ground of the complaint which earnest Parochial Clergy find occasion to make, that their ministrations to the dying poor are often seemingly unproductive, or others come in and, by a system of excitement, efface real repentance,—that the provision made by our Church is neglected.

At that hour, people want, if it may be had, some special, present comfort, as belonging to themselves. Such *is* furnished in their way by those who *can* and do say, "Believe that you will be saved, and you will be saved." It is furnished by the Church, which says, "Repent, pour out thy griefs before God in presence of His Priest, and Christ will absolve thee, and wash thy soul in His own Blood." And this painful review of sins, as it implies real sincerity, so does it, by God's grace, tend much to increase repentance, and love, and trust in God. But if we are to bring people to a very painful effort, we ought to offer them all to support them, which we are empowered. While warning against

delays of repentance, the Minister of Christ must, until the door is shut, both exhort to repentance and tell of its rewards, and encourage to it by the earnest of its acceptance. Who knows what, even in a brief space, God, Who needs no space, may not work in a penitent's soul? "Because," Hooker says⁴, "to countervail the fault of delay, there are in the latest repentance oftentimes the surest tokens of sincere dealing; therefore upon special confession made to the minister of God, he presently absolveth in this case the sick party from all his sins by that authority which Jesus Christ hath committed unto him, knowing that *God respecteth not so much what time is spent, as what truth is shewed in repentance.*"

Such were the cases which were chiefly before the writer's mind; cases, of which every one who has been called upon to minister to the sorrows of men's souls, knows that there are too many. Not the peace only, but the salvation of the soul, is now often in peril. For despondency is Satan's deadliest weapon, when men have deeply sinned; and he uses it too fatally to plunge men deeper in sin, or hold them fast in it, as thinking that recovery is hopeless.

Yet such are not the only cases to which the provisions of our Church directly apply. She explicitly contemplates another class, tender consciences, who need comfort, and peace, and re-assurance of the favour of their Heavenly Father. For (blessed be God!) there are those who feel the weight of any slight sin, more than others do "whole cart-loads;"

⁴ vi. 4. 15.

and who do derive comfort and strength from the special application of the power of the keys to their own consciences. The words of our Church are very large; “a full trust in God’s mercy and a quiet conscience,” “if any by this means cannot quiet his own conscience herein, but requireth further comfort and counsel,” “to the avoiding of all scruple and doubtfulness.” What Minister of Christ, then, should take upon himself to drive away “His lambs,” as if persons were to have less of the Ministry of comfort, the less they had offended God? As if any thing ought, in the estimation of the Christian Minister, to be of slight account, which disturbs the peaceful mirror of the soul, wherein it reflects God! The “benefit of Absolution,” then, is intended by our Church, not only for the penitent, who are by it assured of God’s acceptance of their repentance, and often by it replaced in a state of grace, but for all who can, through its ministry, approach with lightened, more kindled hearts, to the Holy Communion. Our Church, in leaving her children free, did not mean to stint the use of the gifts entrusted to her, to force all consciences to one level; nor because she does not *require* Confession, therefore, (as some now would seem to interpret her,) by an opposite constraint to that which she laid aside, to *hinder* or withhold them from it. It was beautifully said in her first Liturgy⁴,—“requiring such as shall be satisfied with a general Confession not to be offended with them that do use, to their further satisfying,

⁴ The Book of Common Prayer, &c., 1549.

the auricular and secret Confession to the priest; nor those also which think needful or convenient, for the quietness of their own consciences, particularly to open their sins to the priest, to be offended with them that are satisfied with their humble confession to God, and the general confession to the Church; but in all things to follow and keep the rule of charity; and every man to be satisfied with his own conscience, not judging other men's minds or consciences; whereas he hath no warrant of God's Word to the same." And in later days, the principle of our Church was briefly characterized by a Bishop⁵, belonging to an acknowledged English school. "It is confessed that private confession to a priest is of very ancient practice in the Church; of excellent use and practice, being discreetly handled. *We refuse it to none, if men require it, if need be to have it.* We urge it, and persuade it in extremes. We urge it in case of perplexity, for the quieting of men disturbed in their consciences."

Such, then, are the cases contemplated by our Church, the restoration of penitents, the relief of the conscience, either in sickness or before the Holy Communion, from the weight of grievous sin; the quieting of perplexed minds.

But, as was said, she restricted it not to the cases in which she recommended it. She did not, therefore, discourage it, when she ceased to urge it. We must believe that she who encouraged it in these

⁵ Bp. Montague, quoted by Wordsworth, p. 77.

cases, would have recommended it in any other, if the need had then arisen, when she was free to recommend any thing.

Such a deep need, then, has arisen in the case of our youth. The "world" has ever thought, and will think, that, because children are little, the sins of children are of slight account. Not so conscience and experience, or the Word of God. Every one who has been called upon to minister in this way to human souls, knows too well, how years of sin and misery have mostly had their starting-point in some sin of the child. Even amid the deepest wounds of later life, one, perhaps the first grave offence of the child, lives ineffaceably in the memory of the penitent. Years of forgetfulness of self and of God have not been able to blot it out from the memory. As the freshness of early innocence, when the child, yet new from its Maker's Hands, was also newly washed from original guilt, is a bright, glad spot, over which the soul ever after yearns with a sacred unutterable longing, so that first breath of graver sin, which tainted that new paradise, leaves a painful memory of its own, single in the soul's history. It may seem strange, that after deep, heathenish, sins, that one, in itself so much lighter sin, should stand out so vividly in the memory. But the fact may be of great moral value. It is not an exaggeration, since it recurs again and again, and seems stamped by the Hand of God upon the conscience. It is His witness that childhood is a very sacred age. How should it not be, when He chose

it as a type of His disciples, and pronounced such a heavy woe on any one who made "one of these little ones to stumble?" But it is more. It is a witness how fearful, beyond all thought, sin is, when the first grave sin, by which the soul rebelled against God, wounds the soul so deeply; for deep must be the wound which after-years do not efface. Even when the soul has been covered over and over with sores, it has still felt, with a special pain, the wound of that first childish sin. But more. The young need to be warned, not only against sin which they know, but against sin which they scarcely suspect to be sin. It will not be thought, that such strong language as has been used in this Sermon⁵, was used lightly in the House of God, in His immediate Presence, and as His Minister. It was founded on extensive, painful, knowledge. People speak commonly of the evils of Confession, as likely, or in some cases actually having conveyed to the soul, knowledge of evil. And it is painfully true that, in unskilful hands, in other countries, conducted in a dry technical way, it has⁶. But they forget that there are those around youth by whom they are more likely to be taught evil, than by the Priest; there is one nearer still to the soul, whose unceasing object it is, not to guard against it, but to instil and suggest it. Evil is mostly diligent in propagat-

⁵ p. 52 and 54.

⁶ It is admitted with sorrow and indignation in Manuals, which warn earnestly against carelessness so terrible, as Bailly, t. iv. p. 257, sqq. ed. 6.

ing itself; one evil companion does often a world of evil; the good are tacitly a burthen to the bad, so the bad instinctively seek to make others like themselves. It is a great trial not to be ashamed of ignorance, even of evil. "Amongst my equals," says St. Augustine⁷ of his heathen youth, "I was ashamed of a less shamelessness." Be the physician removed, lest he inadvertently poison his patients, if there be no risk, that the poison, introduced from other sources, shall work more secretly and more fatally! But again this is not the fear to which *our* nation is exposed; it can be avoided by ordinary caution and cleanness of heart. Purity of soul is guarded by Him Who gives it; it is not easily injured even by one unskilful; where it exists, it carries its own evidence; it is not blighted by all the foulness of the world, much less will it be by the Priests of God.

But be it (as people think) a choice of evils, as there must be evil, wherever there is human infirmity and ignorance, and this there must be in things ministered by man. And yet let people bring before themselves, that it is a choice of evil; that all evil and peril does not lie on the side of sacred intercourse with God's Priests⁸; that the world

⁷ Conf. ii. 7 and 17.

⁸ As much has been said of late very offensively on this subject, it may be mentioned that, in the "Manuel des Confesseurs," there are given, from the "Prêtre Sanctifié," special cautions as to "les interrogations sur la pureté avec les enfans, avec les adultes et les personnes mariées." (p. 157, 158.) It is advised to risk incomplete confession, rather than risk conveying knowledge of

and Satan are busy, and with dreadful success; and then let them weigh which is safest,—to leave the soul open to the inroads of the world and Satan, or to guard it, even though “he who is to watch for the soul” be liable to occasional error. The writer is almost ashamed to say so much; but the deep suspicion fostered unhappily in the English mind, by which their holiest earthly affections are enlisted against the very remedy for sore existing evil, made it a duty to speak plainly, and to make one strong protest against it. Let this be said; they who, through ministering to such as after sin have again been brought back to God, have known their whole sorrowful history, have had no doubt, that, humanly speaking, in most cases, *early confession would, by the blessing of Almighty God, have saved them from their sin and misery*; and then let men think whether it be not possible, that this suspicion of confession may be sowed by the father of lies himself, in order to keep his own kingdom undisturbed, and carry on his ravages in the soul unhindered.

We do not disuse medicines for the body because poisons have been administered through carelessness,

evil to one ignorant of it. Again, there and elsewhere, special warning is given not to mention the circumstances of any such sins. S. Charles Borromeo gives cautions to the same effect, *ib.* p. 196. The “Manuel” is the work chiefly used in France; the “Prêtre Sanctifié,” has been sanctioned at Rome also. Bailly (probably, in the passage lately referred to, to prove the contrary) gives most earnest admonitions as to caution “*ne juniores ea doceantur quæ feliciter ignorabant.*”—T. iv. p. 257. ed: 6.

or disorders wholly mistaken, and so treated as to bring death, not life, or even the infection of mortal diseases been unsuspectingly conveyed; nor do men cease to take advice as to their estates, because ignorant or dishonest lawyers have at times ruined their clients. People are content to run risks in one case, because they value their lives or estates: they magnify the risks in the other, because they either value not their souls, or dislike the cure, or think they cannot be lost. "One we must have," says Bp. Andrewes⁹, "to know thoroughly the state of our lands or goods; one we must have, entirely acquainted with the state of our body: in our souls it holdeth not! I say no more; it were good it did!"

In every thing else, men appeal to experience as the very test of truth; which, then, will they not believe,—that men have been wounded? but themselves confess it; or that they are now healed? but their lives show it; or that this was not the means of their healing? how, then, is it, that up to this time they were sick, ever sinking back into the same sins, and now are whole? This is said, of course, simply why people should not *à priori* speak against truth which they know not, not as the ground of that truth. Such facts bring the truth home to us individually, as acts of the Providence, or Justice, or Love of Almighty God impress more deeply upon our souls the truths of nature or of grace which we before believed. The ground for

⁹ Serm. iv. on Whitsunday, ad fin. quoted by Wordsworth, p. 73, 74.

belief that "Our Lord Jesus Christ hath left power with His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in Him," is His own words, which the Church hath ever understood, as He, in their plain meaning, spake them.

But in all this, nothing has been implied with regard to the *authoritative* restoration of any system of confession. In the abstract, indeed, "with us," as Hooker¹ says, "the Church is not denied to have authority either of abridging or *enlarging* the use and exercise of that power." It is a matter of discipline, open to the Church, to enforce public penance, as in the Ancient Church, or private confession, as now in the Roman Church; or to leave the exercise of it to the consciences of individuals. But no amount of *voluntary* confession involves the restoration of *compulsory*; the one is the prompting of the conscience within, the other the provision of discipline without. And all the indications of God's Providence, for some time past, point to the great restoration of inward life in this portion of His Church, as the inward operation of God the Holy Ghost, not to be promoted by any outward laws or discipline. We need no *organic* change in the Church, no Convocation, no laws, no enforcement of outward directions, no public discipline. It were to begin at the wrong end. What we need is, that men's hearts should be restored, the longings after a more inward, or more watchful, more devoted life, fostered, the desire of greater strictness with self, and conformity to the

¹ See p. 12, note.

Will of God strengthened, the indistinct feeling after a higher standard of duty confirmed and more defined. The duty of the present day is not to forestall, or calculate, or plan, for the future; but to do that for the present needs, which God gives to be done. Our duties lie severally to individuals, of whom God assigns the charge to any; as a whole, we need to follow, not to guide; for That which we should follow is the only sure Guide, the deep Working of the Holy Spirit, which is anew more fully penetrating our whole Church, and lifting it up, as a whole, as the Ark upon the waters.

What then was said in this sermon as to the duties of the Clergy², had reference, not to the introduction of any new system, but to this only, how existing needs of the laity might be met. As was stated in the sermon itself, the exercise of private Confession and Absolution has arisen, not in the recommendations of the Clergy, but in the needs both of the Clergy and laity. And these needs must increase, as, with deepening earnestness, the consciousness of past heavy sin becomes more burthen-some, or persons become more alive to the evil of all sin, and look out for every aid which may, by God's help, be a check upon it, or, through the Blood of Christ, may cleanse from it.

It is then an entire perversion of the whole ques-

² Many of the Congregation, for whom University Sermons are intended, necessarily being Clergymen, it has never been thought beyond a Preacher's province to speak of our common duties.

tion, that some have ventured to speak of "priestly power," "spiritual independence," "sacerdotal rights," &c. If a physician goes about to minister to the sick, bind up the broken, apply to the cure of diseases the medicines which God has given him the knowledge and the skill to use, no one speaks of "assumption of power;" no one thinks it a part of "independence" to die neglected. Why then speak of "priestly power," when people ask the Ministers of God to impart that with which God has entrusted them? Why is it undue "power" to bind up the broken-hearted, to pour into their wounds the wine and oil of penitence, to lift them up when desponding, to loose them, in Christ's Name, from the chains of their sins, and encourage them anew to the conflict? Why but that to those who know not what the conflict is, what sin is, who have no idea of mental sickness, or anxiety or distress, all, both sickness and remedy, must seem a dream? To minister to bodily wants is accounted a benefit; to minister to spiritual, which men know not of, is a reproach. In the world, "they that exercise lordship over them are called benefactors;" but even an Apostle had occasion to say, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"

Yet one would fain hope, that some who do so speak, do not mean this. It cannot surely be meant, that if religious parents taught their children to confess their faults to themselves, and then, at a somewhat riper age, transferred them to a minister of

God, to open their hearts to him^e; or if they, who are burthened with the memory of past, heavy sin, and cannot get free from it, long to pour it out before God in the presence of His Priest, and receive through him the sentence of God's forgiveness; or if people find that to take shame is a healthful medicine, or that confession is a quieting of the conscience, a check to the inferior will, that they fall not again and again into the same faults; or that it keeps the heart clean, and that God thereby imparts new energy to serve Him,—it cannot be meant that willingness to minister to such cases is an assumption of priestly power, or that to recommend in specific cases a known remedy, is to interfere between the soul and God. Who shall venture to call that "Priestcraft" which is the channel of God's grace to the soul?

Let those who are whole (God grant that they be found such in the Day of Judgment!) dispense with a Physician; let any who find it suffice to them to bring their sicknesses before the Heavenly Physician, accept their healing thankfully from His Hand, the Good Samaritan; they who do this habitually and earnestly, will be the last to blame those who seek in any lawful way to have the diseases of their souls healed. But let not men declaim against remedies which they have not tried, nor seek to deter the

² The pious Chancellor Gerson (A. D. 1400) in his "De Parvulis ad Christum trahendis," with large experience, speaks of the great peril of early corruption, and of confession as "directrix efficacissima ad Christum."

wounded of Christ's flock from being bound up, lest they draw down upon themselves that woe, "Ye neither enter in yourselves, and those who would have entered in, you hinder." "For thus saith the Lord God, Behold I, even I, will both search My sheep and seek them out: I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment ³."

It now remains only to state, that parts of the Sermon were omitted in the delivery, since it seemed likely, even thus, to reach the full limit of University Sermons. These parts have been inclosed within brackets, except that, where the omissions consisted of half sentences, in which no doctrine was contained, or the omission of texts of Scripture, it would have been simply pedantic to mark it.

One word only of caution may be added to the young, in whose hands this Sermon may fall, with regard to the passages on Mortification in pp. 62, 64, which were the rather omitted in the delivery, lest, without explanation, any should act upon them indiscreetly. It is part of the humility of penitence to feel one's self unable to guide one's self. For there is much risk ⁴, lest, in the first fervour of peni-

³ Ezek. xxxiv. 11. 16.

⁴ See Mr. Newman's valuable Sermon, "Dangers to the Penitent," in the "Sermons on the Subjects of the Day."

tence, a person should bind himself with rigid rules, disproportioned to his weakness, which might injure body or mind; or entangle himself with indefinite, or too minute, or unbending rules, which, under altered circumstances, or in time, might become unfitting or a snare to the conscience; and then a person grows weary, or desponds, or loses the cheerfulness of his penitence and goes on as a slave, or relaxes unduly and falls into carelessness, or is beset by scruples, and tossed hither and thither, instead of keeping, by the grace of God, a steady, onward course. If a person must guide himself, it is better to take some gentle rule at first, involving moral discipline and restraint, correcting some wrong temper or self-will, or to make the fasts of the Church penitential, rather than to add bodily discipline, of his own mind. But it is better, of course, not to be one's own physician, when the mind which would have to prescribe for its own healing, is itself the sick part of us. And God in His mercy has given us, everywhere, those who have learnt of Him how "to lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for the feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but that it rather be healed."

May He Who has begun a good work in us, perform it unto the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ Church,
Septuagesima, 1846.

A

S E R M O N,

&c.

ST. JOHN XX. 21—23.

“Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you. As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

IT will be in the memory of some that when, nearly three years past, Almighty God (for “secret faults,” which He knoweth, and from which, I trust, He willed thereby the rather to “cleanse” me,) allowed me to be deprived for a time of this my office among you, I was endeavouring to mitigate the stern doctrine of the heavy character of a Christian’s sins, by pointing out the mercies of God which might reassure the penitent, the means of his restoration, the earnestness of his pardon. And in so doing, it seemed best, first to dwell upon the unfathomable mercies of God in Christ, the exhaustless abyss of mercy in the Infinite Fountain of Mercy;—when it is not finally shut out, Infinite as Himself, as being poured out from His Infinity; and then, more directly, on all those

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untold and ineffable mercies contained in the Intercession of our Lord, at the Right Hand of God, for us. For so, I hoped, would the hearts of penitents be the more fixed upon Him, the Source of all mercies, and their faith be strengthened, and they the more hope that no depth of *past* sin could utterly sever them from the love of Christ; nay, could sever them from no degree or fulness of His unspeakable love. For what limit shall there be to His tender mercy, Who devised that wondrous scheme of man's redemption, and gave His Only-Begotten, Co-equal, Son, that man, the work of His Hands, should not perish? What bounds to the compass of His love, Who, being Eternal God, so compassionated us as to take our nature upon Him, that He might die for us; and not die only, "but live to make intercession for us"? What bounds to His power to restore, Who hath "all power in heaven and in earth," and as yet exerciseth that power to restore us? What an infinite depth must there be in that love, which joined our lowliness to His Majesty, took our misery, to impart to us His Mercy, His Love, and His Joy! And so I hoped that both they, who, educated in imperfect systems, suspect all who speak of the channels of Divine Mercy, as though they forgot Him, Its Everflowing Source, might be less indisposed to the truth; and that they who received the truth, might have their souls the more fixed upon Him, Who is the Truth, and by Whom to us is all grace and truth. And when, further, I began to speak of the means

by which God applies that grace, I wished to dwell upon those sacred Gifts by which He vouchsafes to impart it *to* us, before I spoke of those acts of our own, yet equally His Gifts *in* us, by which He worketh it *in* us; that so we might the more have it impressed upon us, that all is of Him. And of these Gifts, I spoke first of the Holy Eucharist, rather than of the special application of the power of the keys, because I hoped that on that great Gift, whereof we all habitually partake, we might be the rather one; and not dispute (as I never meant to speak controversially) upon the Gifts Which He left as “the pledges of His love;” whereas, since the special use of the power of the keys was, in the last unhappy century, so much laid aside, and has been but partially resumed, and the very language of our Divines or the Reformers is so unfamiliar at least to men’s minds and sympathies, I could not but fear that it might to many seem an unaccustomed teaching, distinctly as it is owned by our Church. I dwelt then first on the comfort of the Holy Eucharist to the penitent, as a Sacrament and as a commemorative Sacrifice. As a Sacrament, because, in the words of our Liturgy, in It “our sinful bodies are made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most Precious Blood;” as a commemorative Sacrifice, I will simply rehearse to you some of the words of the Apostolic Bp. Wilson¹, who, in his

¹ Sunday Meditations, *before Service begins*. Add *ibid*. “We offer unto Thee, our King and our God, this Bread and this Cup.

Sacra Privata, thus prays: "May it please Thee, O God, Who hast called us to this ministry, to make us worthy to offer unto Thee this Sacrifice for our own sins and for the sins of Thy people."

And now, brethren, I would proceed to speak of that great authoritative act, whereby God in the Church still forgives the sins of the penitent. For all forgiveness of sin, as every gift of mercy

"We give Thee thanks for these and for all Thy mercies; beseeching Thee to send down Thy Holy Spirit upon this Sacrifice, that He may make this Bread the Body of Thy Christ, and this Cup the Blood of Thy Christ; and that all we; who are partakers thereof, may thereby obtain a remission of our sins and all other benefits of His Passion.

"May I atone^a Thee, by offering to Thee, O God, by offering to Thee the pure and unbloody Sacrifice, which Thou hast ordained by Jesus Christ. Amen."

And *ibid.* Wed. Medit. LENT. Meditations proper for a Clergyman. "Give me such holy dispositions of soul whenever I approach Thine Altar, as may in some measure be proportionable to the holiness of the work I am about, of presenting the prayers of the faithful, of offering a spiritual Sacrifice to God, in order to convey the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—the true Bread of Life—to all His members. Give me, when I commemorate the same Sacrifice that Jesus Christ once offered, give me the same intentions that He had, to satisfy the justice of God, to acknowledge His mercies, and to pay all that debt which a creature owes to his Creator. None can do this effectually but Jesus Christ: Him, therefore, we present to God, in this holy Sacrament."

^a Ed. 2. fol. 1782. Other Edd. have "atone unto Thee." The above is probably correct; "atone" being so used for to "appease."

or of grace, by whomsoever or howsoever it comes to us, is from Him. [He Who said, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire," Himself baptizeth invisibly whom the Church visibly baptizeth in His Name. He Who said, "It is not ye who speak, but the Spirit of your Father Who speaketh in you," Himself, as He promised, calleth, converteth, exhorteth, teacheth, guideth, through those to whom He has given commission to do any office in His Name. He Who said, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and say to her, her sin is pardoned," Himself is, through them, The Only Comforter. He Who said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," Himself, by His Word of Power, invisibly consecrates and sends down His Spirit. He Who said, "Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them;" and Who, as our Church says in her most solemn Absolution, "hath left power with His Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and turn to Him," Himself looseth the bands of sins which He commandeth His servants who stand by to unloose in His Name; Himself absolveth in heaven those who, according to His Will, are absolved on earth. In all things²], the Church or her Ministers are not instead of, but the instruments of, Christ. [Even as the eyes, the hands, the feet, act not instead of the soul, which informeth the whole body and acteth through every por-

² In preaching, this was abridged thus: "Baptizing, Absolving, Teaching, Consecrating, the Church," &c.

tion and member of it, so the “goodly feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace,” or the “hands,” which are “laid on” in the Name of Christ, or the Voice, which in Baptism pronounces the Name of the Holy Trinity upon us, or in Absolution saith, “By His Authority committed unto me, I absolve thee from all thy sins,” in the Name of the Same Holy Trinity, avail, not of themselves, but as the members, the feet, the hands, the voice of Christ. And as Almighty God chose some created form, in which to appear to man, and what was seen by the Patriarchs, was a created appearance, yet He was seen in the flame of fire in the bush, and heard on Mount Sinai; and again, “descended in a bodily shape like a dove,” and a voice was heard, “This is My Beloved Son;” and still man “hath neither heard His Voice nor seen His Shape;”—so in all which is performed according to His Will, He it is, Who, “distributing to every man severally as He wills,” worketh, through each member of His Mystical body and His visible instruments, that which He commandeth to be done in His own Name.] “God Alone,” says S. Pacian³, “can forgive sin. True! But that also which He doth through His priests, is His own Power.” “The Novatians,” says S. Ambrose⁴, “say that they show reverence to the Lord, reserving to Him Alone the power of forgiving sins.

³ Ep. 1, ad Sympr. § 11, p. 325, O. T. add S. Firmilian, ap. S. Cyprian, Ep. 75. § 4. p. 271.

⁴ De Pœnit. i. 2.

But indeed none do Him greater wrong, than they who would rescind His commands, and cast back upon Himself the office He committed to them. For since the Lord Jesus Himself said in His Gospel, ‘Receive the Holy Ghost; Whose sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whose sins ye retain, they are retained,’ who honours Him most, he who obeyeth His commands or he who resisteth? The Church in both observeth obedience, both in binding and loosing sin.” [“Why,” he says again⁵, “baptize ye, if sins may not be remitted through man? For in Baptism is the remission of all sins. Where is the difference, whether through penitence or through the laver the priests exert this power given to them? One is the mystery in both. But thou sayest, that in the laver the grace of the mysteries worketh. What in penitence? Worketh not the Name of God?” And again⁶, on those solemn words, “It is impossible to renew them,” “God is able, when He willeth, to forgive us sins, even those which we think cannot be forgiven. And, therefore, what to us seemeth impossible to be obtained, to God it is possible to grant.—It seemed impossible that water should wash away sin, or that sins should be forgiven through penitence; Christ granted this to His Apostles, which from the Apostles was transmitted to the offices of the priests; that, therefore, was rendered possible which seemed impos-

⁵ Ib. i. 8, § 37, 38.

⁶ Ib. ii. 2.

sible." Once more ⁷: "It cannot be doubted that the Spirit forgiveth sins, since the Lord Himself saith, 'Receive the Holy Ghost; whose sins ye remit, they shall be remitted.' See how sins are forgiven by the Holy Ghost. But to the remission of sins, men supply their ministry, yet do not exercise the right of any power; for they do not forgive sins in their own, but in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. They pray, God giveth; the execution is through man, the richness of the gift is from the Power on High." And Origen ⁸ on the same point: "He on whom Jesus hath breathed ⁹, forgiveth whom God would forgive, and retaineth incurable sins, ministering

⁷ De Sp. S. iii. 18, § 137.

⁸ De Orat. c. xxviii.

⁹ Origen adds here: ("As the Apostles, and they who may be known from the fruits as having received the Holy Spirit, and become spiritual by being led by the Spirit, after the manner of a son of God, to do each several thing according to the Word" or "Reason"). But, apparently, he only means by this restriction that such priests only as were spiritual persons would have the gift of "discerning of spirits;" and so, in their case, it might be the more hoped that their judgment would be the same as His Who "searcheth the heart." Shortly after, in answer to the difficulty, why the Apostles, having the power, do not remit all sins, he compares the "retaining" of "sins" under the Gospel to those cases under the law in which the priest was not to offer sacrifice; and adds, "So then the Apostles or the priests likened to the Apostles, after the Pattern of the Great High-Priest, having received discernment as to the Service of God, know for what sins they ought to offer sacrifices, and when, and in what manner: and also for what they ought not so to do."

unto God, Who Alone hath the power of forgiving, even as the prophets ministered unto God, in speaking not their own, but what was of the Divine Will." And S. Chrysostom¹: "Whatsoever the priest hath entrusted to him is of God Alone to give—And why say I priests? Neither Angel nor Archangel can effect any thing as to the things given by God, but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, dispenseth all; yet the priest lendeth his tongue and affordeth his hand." And in like manner S. Augustine².

And this efficacy, we, to whom God has given our lot in this portion of the Church, must in general believe; our own acts of devotion bear witness to us. For this was the express reason³, why, in our daily service, a solemn confession and Absolution precede the use of the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms, that so we might become fitter to use His Divine words, and to praise Him; we are directed to receive the Absolution kneeling, both at the daily service and at the Holy Communion, a humble posture, which we do not use at any mere exhortation or declaration or teaching; itself is entitled, "The absolution or remis-

¹ In Johann. Hom. 86, fin.

² Ench. c. 83. "The Holy Spirit, in Whom Christ remitteth sins;" speaking of those who "believe not that sins are remitted in the Church." See at length below.

³ This fact is stated on the authority of the late Bp. Lloyd, at the time when he was examining the origin of the several parts of our Liturgy. Dr. Bisse mentions the same ground, Sermon II. "Beauty of Holiness;" see at the end.

sion of sins, to be *pronounced* by the priest alone" (for which, in a daughter-Church, "the *declaration*"⁴ of Absolution to be made by the priest alone," was substituted in compromising times). "Almighty God," it solemnly rehearseth, "hath given *power* and commandment" to His ministers, not "to declare" only, but "to pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins:" now "power" implies an authoritative act; and to "pronounce our pardon," if penitent, is a present act, not a mere abstract declaration, that God forgiveth the penitent⁵. Such is our least solemn form of Absolution. And it has been often observed, how, as the penitence may in each case be supposed to be deeper, the Absolution by the Church becomes more authoritative and fuller; until, at last, in the private absolution, when the conscience most feels its burden, and has laid it down at the Feet of our Lord, she speaks, with the full consciousness of the

⁴ American Common Prayer-book. The restriction to "the Priest alone" shows the intention to be the same.

⁵ Wheatley (I have since seen) insists, with much force, on these and yet further points. 1. The Priest *stands up*, as with authority, and pronounces. 2. The title "THE *Absolution*," not "a *Declaration* of Absolution." 3. The word "Pronounce," signifying, as *Pronuntiare*, "to give sentence." 4. A Declaration, exciting to repentance, would rather have *preceded* the Confession. 5. The solemn preamble asserting the "power and commandment" given, followed by words which imply the exercise of that power. 6. "His people, *being* penitent;" but the penitent are the objects of Absolution, the impenitent of exhortation.

authority, by Apostolic descent transmitted to her, words, which if not authorised, were blasphemy, “by His authority committed unto me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Nor can there be, in this, any question of freeing from the censures of the Church and of restoring to communion, from which among ourselves, none, except on individual responsibility, are in practice shut out, who do not shut out themselves. It is a private act between the sinner’s soul and God, in the presence of His priest, the sinner seeking to have the burden of his sin relieved, the priest declaring, in the Name of the Holy Trinity, “by His Authority, committed unto me, I absolve thee.” And to this, such among us as are parochial ministers, are bound to invite their people, to “open their grief,” not in sickness only, but before the Holy Communion, if they cannot “quiet their own consciences,” that they “may receive the benefit of Absolution;” and in visiting the sick, our Church directs those who will obey her, “to move the sick person to make a *special* confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any weighty matter,” not to wait for him, but ourselves to “move him thereto;” and then, “if he humbly and heartily desire it, thus to absolve him ⁶.” And “His Autho-

⁶ Both of these provisions are omitted in the American Common Prayer-Books. Both are insisted upon by Hooker, in a passage very remarkable for the thoughtfulness with which it is worded; especially in that he concedes that the Church *may* order this

rity” so to do, was, ye know, conveyed to us, in the very words⁷, in which it was given by our Lord to the Apostles; so that whatever authority they conveyed to the Apostles, they do, thus far, convey to us also: “which although,” says S. Pacian⁸, “for our sins it be presumptuous to claim, yet God, who hath granted unto bishops the name of even His Only Beloved, will not deny it unto them.”

whole subject of private Confession and Absolution as she judges best, and regards the course taken by the Church of England as liable to revision by her—(“The Church of England *hitherto* hath thought it the safer way,” &c.) “And for private Confession and Absolution, it standeth thus with us. The minister’s power to absolve is publicly taught and professed; the Church not denied to have authority either of abridging or enlarging the use and exercise of that power; upon the people no such necessity imposed of opening their transgressions unto men, as if remission of sins otherwise were impossible; neither any such opinion had of the thing itself, as though it were either unlawful or unprofitable, saving only for these inconveniences, which the world hath by experience observed in it heretofore. And in regard thereof, the Church of England *hitherto* hath thought it the safer way to refer men’s hidden crimes unto God and themselves only: howbeit, not without special caution for the admonition of such as come to the Holy Sacrament, and for the comfort of such as are ready to depart the world.” Eccl. Pol. bk. vi. 4. 15, where he enlarges on both.

⁷ “Receive the Holy Ghost [for the Office and Work of a Priest now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands]. Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained,” &c.—Office for the Ordering of Priests.

⁸ Ep. i. § 13. p. 326.

[And while among us private Confession has been left to the consciences of individuals, the Church has both deepened the tone of the public Confession, and made the public Absolution more solemn and more authoritative, in that where, in other Offices⁹, there is a sort of mutual Absolution of the priest and people, in ours the Absolution is confined to "the priest alone."]

And all this doctrine of our Church as to Absolution is the more solemn, as not being a profession only in the sight of men, but embodied in acts in the Name of Almighty God Himself; in His daily worship; at the Holy Communion, or in earnest preparation for it; and when the soul is approaching for its last conflict, for that moment which sums up all the past, and shall decide eternity. The sacred stillness at the Holy Communion, when, after the deep confession which our Church gives us, one voice alone is heard, and we, the rest, in silence receive it; the intense earnest longing, with which the penitent awaits those words of awful comfort, which the Church commissions her priests to pronounce, or the thrill of awe which any of us must ourselves have felt, when we sinners had to take on our lips her words, "by His Authority I absolve thee," and that in the Name of the All-Holy Trinity, may well make us think more deeply, how very solemn the doctrine is, which is so embodied.

⁹ In the Breviary and Missal.

There is a further, in some sense more awful and more painful, part of the doctrine of the keys, to which our Church also bears witness, the power not to loose only, but to bind; not to remit only, but to retain sin. She yearly expresses¹ her sorrow at the loss of the "godly discipline," whereby "persons who stood convicted of notorious sin, were put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls might be saved in the Day of the Lord;" and in her Articles (Art. xxxiii.) she speaks of such, as being "cut off from the unity of the Church," and to be counted "as heathen," "until they be openly reconciled by penance." But this whole subject of discipline does not belong to me. Nor need I speak of that power of "binding," which, equally with that of "loosing," is in our Church conferred on her priests in the Name of the Holy Trinity; since such a power is to be exercised only towards the impenitent: our office is chiefly with the penitent. The one object, as I have explained, of this series of sermons, is to minister to one class of souls, those whose consciences being

¹ Communion Service. It has been suggested to me to observe, how "the mode of expression in the Communion Service implies, that the Absolution after Penance is *the* way of healing post-baptismal sin, and that we do without it for a time, only until we can bear our cure." And this falls in with the repeated and earnest attempts of Cranmer to bring in Church-discipline. See in Wordsworth's valuable collection, Appendix to a Sermon on Evangelical Repentance, p. 41, sqq. Parker, 1842.

oppressed by the memory of past sin, more or less grievous, long to know how they may be replaced in that condition, in which God once placed them; and now, too, my object is, not to speak of discipline in general, or what were best for the Church or for her members generally, but of that mercy which, by the power of the keys, God pours out upon the penitent.

This, then, is probably one ground, why so little needed to be said in the New Testament, as to the forgiveness of sins of a Christian very grievously fallen, that our Lord had left a living provision in His Church, whereby all penitents, however fallen, should be restored. In healthful times, when discipline was observed, and people were in earnest about their souls, and felt the pressure of their sins, and the darkness of the absence of Divine grace, and a healthful fear of the wrath of God, there needed not proof that sins could be forgiven, because their forgiveness was seen, and witnessed, and felt, and shone forth in the renewed health and life of the soul. When the Church "with whom," in the language of a father², "there was one hope, one fear, one joy, one suffering, because there is One Spirit from One Lord and Father, grieved together" over the fall of "one of her members," "together laboured for its cure," and was gladdened by the holy conversation of restored penitents, and their victories in conflicts

² Tert. de Pœn. c. x. p. 366, O. T.

wherein they had before been vanquished, she knew that the gift of reconciliation was lodged in her, in which the whole body took part. Mourning with those who mourned, she knew the rather that they were comforted, whose restoration was furthered by her love and deep sighs and prayers. The discipline under which the penitent was brought and was humbled, was the very token of his restoration. He felt the power lodged in the Church to bind, and its very exercise assured him that he might be loosed. He saw those, once, with himself, oppressed by Satan, set free; and he knew that the inward bonds by which Satan held him, the cords of his sins and the iron chain of evil habits, might be loosed. The Church could give account of the source of her powers, to any who might be entitled to ask her, and could appeal to the commission given her by her Lord; the workings of that power were the pledge to individuals. When she, in her Lord's Name, said to the lame, "Arise, and walk," and to the leper, "Be cleansed," and to the blind, "Wash in the pool of Siloam, i.e. of Him Who is sent," and the palsy of past sin was healed, and men "ran the way of God's commandments," the leprosy and defilement of sin fell off, and "their flesh was turned to them like the flesh of a little child;" and they who had been dried up by the decrepitude of sin, became anew "like little children," "of whom is the kingdom of heaven;" and the blind through trespasses and sins, "saw every thing clearly," and those whose very senses were defiled, could taste

anew the sweetness of heavenly things, “and the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come;”—when through His gifts in the Church God wrought such spiritual miracles as these, no one needed to ask, “By what power or authority doest thou these things?” When by her healing she showed that she was clad with the power of her Lord, none needed to question whether she had the authority of her Lord Who by her healed. When the lame arose and walked, none after that asked Him, “Who is this that forgiveth sins also?”

And if any ask her yet, when she hath said to one crippled by sin, “In the Name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk,”—“By what power or by what name have ye done this?” her answer is still that of St. Peter, “His Name, through faith in His Name, hath made this man strong; yea, the faith which is by Him, hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all³.” His Name is it, through faith in His Name, which healeth, although pronounced by her, at His bidding.

Thus the practice of the Church became the comment upon Holy Scripture, upon which that practice rested; as, in other practice, the Apostolic rite of infant baptism pointed out a meaning of our Lord’s words,—“Suffer little children to come unto me,”—about which we might otherwise have doubted; or, in doctrine, the Creeds, which rest on Holy Scrip-

³ Acts iv. and iii. 16.

ture, teach to us meanings of the Divine Word and saving truths of faith, which, but for them, we should never have perceived. [The possession of the key at once opens to us what without it would have been hidden from us. And so, even in human documents, every one knows how difficult it is to define the meaning of what has been long in disuse; whereas of what we use, we most often, perhaps, forget the grounds of our usage, in the practice whereof we never doubted. So far from needing strict or full proof of any thing which through habitual belief or practice has become part of ourselves, proof is lost in knowledge, and intuitive perception displaces reasoning. We think not of title-deeds when we are in possession of our inheritance from above. We are even startled, or perhaps for a moment perplexed, by a question as to the ground of action, which, by practice, had to us become of the nature of an axiom, or is founded upon first principles; or of doctrine, which, from long belief, has been inwrought into our souls. And, contrariwise, in the absence of such practice, it must be expected that much will become again obscure, and minds will be driven backwards or forwards, not knowing how much of Holy Scripture to apply to their own case; sometimes speaking to themselves "peace when there is no peace;" or again, scarcely venturing to apply to themselves words of comfort and mercy which God intended for them. As, in other doctrine, when people leave the guidance of the Church, heresy, or what the

ancient Church called “ungodly blasphemy,” will seem to them the most natural, or the only meaning of Holy Scripture; while] to the believer, because he believes, the full truth of the Gospel sheds its light upon the whole of Holy Scripture, and is reflected and flashes forth from it. The Church proposes, faith receives, the Holy Ghost teaches, Scripture establishes, holy living roots it fast in us, devotion makes it part of ourselves; or rather, the same Holy Spirit worketh all in us, teaching us, and making our hearts teachable; imparting to us the truth, in form in the Creeds, in substance in Holy Scripture, and opening our hearts to believe, and love, and worship, until through love and devotion we live in and on that faith, as the breath of our spiritual life,—ever, as in our natural life, renewed and sustained by Him, ever unconsciously, anew received by us, yet never parted with, until, as part of ourselves, it passeth with us into that blessed world, where it melts into sight of Him Whom here, not seeing, it loved.

[Apart from the doctrine and practice of “the power of the keys,” there would be difficulty as to the case of very grievous sin of the Christian. “What is the amount of the restoration? how may he know that he is restored? is his restoration complete? can he be restored after any degree of sin? can he have at once the full grace of Christ in the New Testament to keep him from falling; and, if he fall deeply, are all the evangelic promises of the Old

Testament his also, when he has had them once, and has forfeited them?" For the study of the New Testament, could we imagine pursued apart from the light which we derive unconsciously from the instructions of the Church, might well affright the sinner. It speaks chiefly of holiness, as the path of the Christian; he is "full of sin." The Epistle, which most fully sets forth the doctrine of grace and the course of the Christian life, and its relation to the law, most speaks of "walking according to the Spirit," and of growth in holiness. "God," it says ⁴, "has set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation, through faith in His Blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins;" but of what sins?—"of the sins that are past," (τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων), "in the forbearance of God," "in the times of ignorance at which God winked." "There is therefore," it ⁵ opens its description of the

⁴ Rom. iii. 25.

⁵ Ib. viii. 1. No one text is adduced out of the Epistle to the Romans on "sin after Baptism," by any expositor of Art. xviii. (see Wordsworth, App. p. 1, 2.) Of the passages cited from the Epistles (see *ibid.*), Gal. vi. 1, St. James iii. 2, 1 John i. 8, 9; ii. 1, 2, relate primarily to sins of infirmity in the Christian; Eph. iv. 32; to past forgiveness; 1 Tim. i. 15, primarily to our first acceptance (as do Acts iii. 19; v. 31.). 2 Cor. ii. 6—8, and vii. 10 (as bearing upon it), directly refer to ministerial absolution, and the dispositions needed for it; as do St. James v. 14—16. 20, to the ministerial office primarily; in 2 Tim. iv. 2, Tit. i. 13, censure implies restoration, but they are addressed to Bishops, as are the exhortations in Rev. ii. iii. (quoted by Tertullian, St. Cyprian, St. Pacian, &c., and they do bear *them* out,

Christian life, "now no condemnation to those which are in Christ Jesus." But who are these? "who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." The parables of our Lord, of the prodigal son, or the stray sheep⁶, do, according to the manifold meaning of Holy Scripture which the Church warrants us in applying to our comfort, relate, in their full blessedness, to any restoration of the penitent. But until we find ourselves thus warranted, we might have

since the very question with the Novatians related to the Church's power to restore). Acts viii. 22, speaks at once of the possibility of restoration from such sins as that of Simon Magus, and its extreme difficulty (see St. Athanasius and others in Scripture Views of Holy Baptism, p. 235, n. 2). The strongest passages are perhaps 1 John v. 16, as stating that the "sin unto death" only was beyond the reach of ordinary intercession (and yet this very text is one which, apart from the teaching of the Church as to Absolution, most often harasses wounded consciences, lest theirs should be that very sin); and 2 Pet. iii. 9.

All this is not said to imply that such texts as 1 John i. 8, 9. ii. 1, 2, &c. are not to be taken in their largest acceptation and deepest comfort, as declaring God's forgiveness of *all* sin. The question is not as to their meaning, but as to the *evidence* of that meaning from the mere context of Holy Scripture, apart from the teaching of the Church, or to their application, independently of the means of restoration which God in her has provided for the penitent.

⁶ Tertullian, as a Montanist, in arguing against the application of this text, found difficulty in the practice of the Church, which, by placing the figure of the Good Shepherd on her chalices, expressed her conviction that the assurance of mercy in the parable belongs to fellow-Christians also; see de Pudic. c. 7 and 10.

feared lest they belonged only to the first—the restoration of man in his fallen estate;—not if, when he had been restored to the fold or to his Father's house, he anew wandered. The promises of the Old Testament seem to belong, in the first instance, to the first Coming of the Redeemer, and to describe the full forgiveness of those who receive Him: *they do not carry their own evidence*, that they belong to those who are fallen from grace, or, in the awful language of the New Testament, “have crucified to themselves the Son of God afresh, and counted the Blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite unto the Spirit of Grace.” And then, on the other hand, are the terrible warnings that such “it is impossible to renew unto repentance;” that “if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries,” and our Lord's warning, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing happen unto thee;” and Esau's lost birthright, when “he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears;” and the threatenings of Divine Wisdom, that there is a time when “they shall call upon Me, but I will not answer.”

The very heresy of Novatian implies, that apart from the Church's system, there is a difficulty; in that his sect, from denying the Church's power to forgive sin in certain cases, went on to deny all

power of restoration, and all the comfort from any other Scripture to the penitent ⁷. For heresy does not start gratuitously out of the mind; in whatever degree it ends by contradicting the Gospel, it starts by some plausible corruption of it. Novatianism never would have been, had the terms of the Gospel and of Holy Scripture been as easy as modern religious systems would make them. Again, these very systems, by forced solutions, show that the letter of Holy Scripture would lead to a very different result. Thus, Luther, and Calvin ⁸, make remission to be effected through the reminiscence of our Baptism; others, in these days, say, that on an act of faith sin is forgiven; others, again, speak of a covenant, into which we enter by Baptism, in which sin is pardoned. And it is, of course, a blessed truth, that by Baptism we are made sons of God, and, as sons, have the sins effaced, “which ⁹, through man’s frailty and infirmity, we afterwards contract;” and, if our wounds be deeper, have been brought by the Good Samaritan into that resting-place, where “sins ¹ are afterwards, not taken away by regeneration, but

⁷ See S. Pacian. Ep. ad Sympr. iii. init. &c.

⁸ Luth. de Captiv. Babyl. cap. de Bapt. Calvin. Institt. 4. 15. § 3, 4; c. 19, § 17. Antid. Conc. Trid. Sess. 7. ad can. 10. Whence Calvin, Institt. 4, 15, 4, and 19, 17, and Melancthon, Loci, A. 1522, call Baptism “the Sacrament of Penitence.” In the Apol. Conf. Aug., penitence is admitted as a sacrament.

⁹ S. Aug. de Nupt. et Concup. c. 26

¹ Id. Ep. 98. ad Bonifac.

healed by another cure." Yet certainly there is not one word in Holy Scripture of any remission of grievous sins prospectively through the Sacrament of Baptism; none of its remembrance being available to us; or of our applying *to ourselves* the promises of the Gospel; and the new covenant of which Jeremiah prophesied, and which St. Paul declared to be fulfilled, was one in which God's "law should be written in their hearts, and God should be their God, and they His people, and all should know Him," not, *as far as it appears from the letter of Holy Scripture*, one in which that law should be very grievously broken, very grievous sin should continually be renewed and continually pardoned. The "sins and iniquities" which "should be no more remembered," are, apparently, past, not present or future, sin; for, in connexion with this very promise, it is added, that "there² is no more sacrifice for sins;" and, therefore, that "if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth," since "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin," there remaineth only "a certain fearful looking for of judgment."

Not that those fearful warnings do belong to all wilful sin; blessed be God, they do not. I say this, only to illustrate how those who form to themselves theories of remission of sin distinct from the provision laid up by God in the Church, do "forsake

² Heb. x. 16—27.

the Fountain of living waters, and hew them out cisterns, broken cisterns, which hold no water."

There are two distinct commissions conveyed to the Apostles, and through them to the Church,—authority to baptize, and authority to remit sins to the baptized; the first not only remitting all sin, but changing the whole man, making him another self; before, out of Christ, now in Christ; new-born, new-created, a member of Christ, a son of God, new-formed "after the Image of Him Who created him." Such a re-creation there cannot again be. In Baptism, a man becomes a new self, and being another man, has no more to do with his former sins, than if they had been committed by another ³, except to love and thank God Who had freed him from them; by Absolution, pardon is given, life is renewed, but the penitent is the same as the sinner. In Baptism, sins are suddenly and painlessly blotted out through grace; deep sins after Baptism are forgiven, but upon deep contrition which God giveth; and deep contrition is, for the most part, slowly and gradually

³ S. Augustine speaks thus of his sins *before* Baptism: "Thou revilest my past ills; what great thing dost thou herein? I am severer against my ills than thou; what thou revilest I have condemned. Here we lived ill, which I confess; and in proportion as I rejoice in the grace of God, so do I for my past sins—what shall I say—grieve? I should grieve, were it still I. But what shall I say? joy? Neither can I say this; for would it had never been I! Yet whatsoever I have been, in the Name of Christ, it is past." (In Ps. 36. Serm. 36, § 19. See S. Aug. Conf. p. 223, note, O. T.)

worked into the soul, deepening with deepening grace, sorrowing still more, as, by God's grace, it more deeply loves; grieved the more, the more it knows Him Whom it once grieved, and through that grief and love inwrought in it by God, the more forgiven. So then, by the very order of God with the soul, (except when He leads it in some special way, and by the Cross and His own overflowing love blots out the very traces of past sin and its very memory,) continued sorrow is not only the condition of continued pardon, but the very channel of new graces and of the renewed life of the soul. Sorrow, as it flows on, is more refined, yet deeper. To part with sorrow and self-displeasure would be to part with love; for it grieveth, and is displeased, because it loves. Again, sins before Baptism come not into judgment at all; they belonged to one who is not; in Baptism he was buried and died, and a new man, with a new life and a new principle of life, was raised through the Resurrection of Christ. Grievous sins after Baptism are remitted by Absolution; and the judgment, if the penitent be sincere, is an earnest of the Judgment of Christ, and is confirmed by Him. Yet the same penitent has yet to appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ, that, according to his sincerity, the Lord may ratify or annul the judgment of His servants.

Yet with these limitations, the pardon upon penitence is as absolute as in Baptism itself. Indeed, the commission to set free from sins, has by ancient

fathers⁴ been thought, in a secondary way, to include the power of Baptism; it is one power, and one pardon, and One Blood⁵ diversely applied.]

This commission, upon which the authority of the Church rests, as it has ever been understood by the Church itself, was given, in part in different words, at three different times. Before the Resurrection, first to St. Peter, as a type of unity: "I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven⁶;" and then, in the same words⁷, to all the Apostles;—both these in promise; and then to all in fulfilment⁸, in that solemn inauguration, the commencement of their Apostolate,

⁴ S. Cyr. Al. ad loc. S. Cypr. Ep. 73, § 7, p. 247, O. T. S. Firmilian, Ep. 75, § 17, p. 279. S. Pacian. Ep. ad Sympr. i. § 11, 12, p. 325. S. Ambr. de Pœnit. i. 8, § 36. S. Greg. Mor. 28, § 18.

⁵ "What is written, 'And the Blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin,' is to be understood both of the confession of Baptism and of the clemency of penitence." S. Jer. c. Pelag. L. 2. c. 7. Add c. Pelag. L. 1. c. 33. (explaining typically Deut. xix.) "he is bid to flee to the city of refuge, and there to abide until the High Priest die, i. e. until he be redeemed by the Blood of the Saviour, either in the house of Baptism or in penitence, which imitates the grace of Baptism through the ineffable clemency of the Saviour, Who willeth not that any should perish, nor hath pleasure in the death of sinners, but that they should be converted and live."

⁶ Matt. xvi. 19.

⁷ Ib. xviii. 18.

⁸ Euthym. ad loc.

with the visible token that the Comforter, Who proceeded from Him, came upon them: "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." Full of majesty and awe is the commission, full of instruction. The greatness of the power intrusted to man might well exceed our belief, and make us tremble to execute it, and almost doubt, as men have doubted, whether they had it. "What angel in Heaven," says our own Hooker⁹, "could have said to man as our Lord did to Peter, 'Feed My sheep: Preach, Baptize: Do this in remembrance of Me. Whose sins ye retain, they are retained; and their offences in heaven pardoned whose faults you shall on earth forgive?' What think we? are these terrestrial sounds, or else are they voices uttered out of the clouds above?" So then our Lord premises His commission with those full brief words, conveying at once both the extent of the commission, and a rule and guidance in it. "As My Father hath sent Me, even so¹ send I

⁹ Eccl. Pol. v. 77, 1. Hooker continues, in the fervid passage, so well known: "The power of the ministry of God translateth out of darkness into glory; it raiseth men from the earth, and bringeth God Himself down from heaven; by blessing visible elements it maketh them invisible grace: it giveth daily the Holy Ghost; it hath to dispose of that Flesh Which was given for the life of the world, and that Blood Which was poured out to redeem souls; when it poureth malediction upon the heads of the wicked, they perish; when it revoketh the same, they revive. O wretched blindness, if we admire not so great power, more wretched if we consider it aright, and, notwithstanding, imagine that any but God can bestow it!"

¹ As far, then, as was possible for man, like Himself, *in the*

you." The very words are beforehand a comfort to the penitent. For to whom was our Lord sent, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to seek and to save that which was lost, to "those who needed a Physician" and knew their need, to "call not the righteous but sinners to repentance²?" "He sets forth at once," says S. Cyril³, "the dignity of the Apostolate and the incomparable glory of the power given them, and suggests, as it seems, the path of Apostolic offices. For if He deemed right so to send His own disciples as the Father sent Him, how must not they who are to be followers of them, needs have in view, to what end the Father sent the Son?—Com-

like end of their mission, the salvation of man (S. Cyril in the text); *in the like powers*, intrusted to them, but inherent in Him; in Him unerring, in the successors of the Apostles liable to error; ("Those things peculiar to God Alone, to absolve sin, these He promises Himself to give." S. Chrys. on St. Matt. xvi. 18, and S. Ambr. in Ps. xxxviii. § 37: "The Lord gave to the Apostles what before was reserved to His own judgment, the loosing of sins by the mercifulness of remission, that what should speedily be loosed might not remain long bound;") *in the like way*; (see S. Cyril below in the text.)

² Quoted by S. Cyril, ad loc.

³ Ad loc. S. Cyril unites the office of teaching as one part of the object of *this* gift of the Holy Ghost, or rather he contemplates that gift, as a whole, in its varied bearings. Authority, power to forgive sins, working of miracles, wisdom, and all the divers operations of the Spirit, are thus included in this gift. Yet this does not, of course, involve any confusion. S. Cyril passes from one to the other; Calvin, &c. resolve all into one, teaching.

prehending then in few words the Apostolic office, He said that He sent them as the Father sent Him, that they might thence know that they ought to call sinners to repentance, to heal the sick in body or in spirit, in all the orderings of their doings not to seek any how their own will; and, as far as was possible, by their Doctrine to save the world."

And as He Himself was "anointed by the Spirit to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound," so when He sent them in His stead, He imparted to them the Comforter, Who being from Himself as from the Father, was to replace Himself. "When He had said this, He breathed upon them, and saith unto them, Receive the Holy Ghost." As an earnest at once of the gift to be bestowed at the Day of Pentecost⁴, and a gift of sanctification for this immediate office⁵, and to

⁴ "Then first after His Resurrection, which the Gospel calls His 'glorifying,' He gave to His disciples His Holy Spirit." S. Aug. Tr. 32, § 6. "The Apostles had received the power of remitting sins then also, when after His Resurrection He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins,' &c. "A larger grace and more abundant inspiration was reserved for that perfection, which was to be bestowed upon the Apostles, whereby they might both receive what they had not yet received, and what they had received, might be able to have more surpassingly." S. Leo, Serm. 2. de Pentec. c. 4.

⁵ S. Chrys. ad loc. "One would not mistake, who should say that then also they received a certain spiritual power and grace, but not so as to raise the dead and work miracles, but so as to

show that the Holy Spirit, Who should come from above, is from Him also, and Consubstantial from Himself⁶, and that He Who created man in His own Image, breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, was now about to re-create them in a more Divine and perfect way by union with Himself⁷, "He breathed upon them," and imparted to them the Holy Ghost. And then He saith to them the solemn words, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

[In this commission, weighty authorities have sup-

portance. For different are the gifts of the Spirit. Wherefore, He added, 'Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted,' showing what kind of operation he gave."

⁶ S. Cyril Al. ad loc. S. Aug. ad loc. "By breathing on them, He signified that the Holy Ghost was not the Spirit of the Father, but His own also;" and de Gen. ad lit. x. § 8. "That Breath from the Body of the Lord was not the Substance of the Holy Spirit, but it was signified that the Holy Spirit so proceeded from Him, as that Breath from His Body."

⁷ S. Cyril Al. ad loc. Euthym. ad loc. S. Aug. in Joh. Tr. 32, § 6. "He breathed on their face, Who by His breath quickened the first man, and raised him from the miry clay; by which breath He gave life to His limbs, signifying that He it was Who breathed on their face, that they should arise from the mire and renounce miry works." S. Basil. de Sp. S. c. 16, § 39. "The Lord, renewing man, and restoring to him the grace from the in-breathing of God, which he had lost, when He had breathed upon the face of the disciples, what saith He? 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost,' &c." Add S. Ambr. in Ps. 118. Serm. 10. § 16, 17.

posed the power of baptizing also to be included. And, according to that fulness of Holy Scripture, whereby, beyond the immediate object of the words, they, like the Eyes of the Lord, look every way, they may include all forgiveness, wheresoever or whensoever sins are remitted through the agency of man. And so in those other words, "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth," it may well be thought that words of larger meaning were purposely chosen, to express the fulness of the authority given; and so that not the power to remit sins only, but that also was included which the Apostles and the Church have since exercised, to change customs and rites, fasts and holy-days and public worship, make what they saw to be for edification binding upon the conscience, and what (not being essential) ceased so to be, to loose. But the largeness of the meaning of Holy Scripture hinders not its definiteness. Light from the Father of lights, it envelopes all in its brightness, yet rests in its full intensity upon each single spot which it lightens. So far from this union with Holy Baptism any how diminishing from the power of the keys, it increases its solemnity: for it brings it the nearer to the greatness of that Sacrament⁸, which,

⁸ See S. Ambrose (above, p. 7). S. Cyril Al. ad loc.: "Guided by the Spirit they remit or retain sins, in two ways, as I suppose. For either they call those to Baptism, who, for the seemliness of their life and their approved faith, ought to obtain it, or they hinder and exclude from the Divine Grace [i. e. from Baptism] some who are not as yet worthy of it. Or in another

issuing from our Lord's Side, unites with Himself. The power of the keys is not thereby excluded (as Novatian taught), if Baptism be therein included; but if they be thus joined together, then Absolution, as a second power of remission lodged with the Church, partakes the more of the character of the first, restoring the returning penitent to the state of grace from which he had fallen, cleansing anew the white robes which he had defiled, remitting the guilt, and opening the avenues to the full inflow of grace which sin had choked. Yet, however the solemn words may be supposed also to include the remission in Baptism, it is even more natural to understand them primarily, of some distinct gift of remission. For every thing, in the action of our Blessed Lord and His words, is distinct from His commission to baptize, whereas the very words point to that other promise of our Lord, also recorded by St. Matthew, "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." Our Lord gave to His Apostles the authority to teach, to baptize, to remit

way, they remit and retain sin, correcting the children of the Church when sinning, and pardoning them when repenting; as Paul delivered the fornicator at Corinth to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved, and again received him," &c. S. Leo, Ep. 108, ad Theod. c. 1: "The manifold mercy of God in such wise succours man in his fall, that not only by the grace of Baptism, but also by the medicine of penitence, the hope of eternal life is restored." (See the whole passage, note M on Tertull. p. 391.) S. Chrys. de Sacerdot. (in the text below, p. 46.)

sins; yet although to preach is to bid men “repent and be converted, that their sins be blotted out;” and Baptism is “for the remission of sins;” He calleth each by its own name, and no where doth He call the office of baptizing to “forgive, or remit sins.” In giving “the power of keys,” He speaks of it also as a strictly personal office; “Whatsoever *ye* shall loose,” “*Whose soever* sins *ye* shall remit?” He gives them special authority to this end; “As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.” He giveth them the Holy Ghost; “He clotheth them with power,” says S. Cyril, “and transformeth them into somewhat other than they have been.” To perform a Divine office, He clotheth them with a Divine power⁹; and to fit them for the ministry of their office, He imparteth the Holy Ghost, Whose is the right¹

⁹ “What the priests perform below, that God confirms above; and the Lord ratifies the sentence of the servants. What then hath He given them but all the heavenly power? For He saith, ‘Whose soever sins ye remit,’ &c. What power can be greater than this? ‘The Father hath given all judgment to the Son.’ But I see them intrusted with the whole by the Son.” S. Chrys. de Sacerd. iii. 5. See Theoph. ad loc. and p. 29, note 1 above, and Hooker, above, p. 28, n. 9.

¹ Consider this, too, that He Who hath received the Holy Ghost, hath received also the power of binding and loosing sin. For so it is written, ‘Receive the Holy Ghost; whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.’ The man who cannot forgive sins hath not the Holy Ghost. The gift [munus] of the Holy Ghost is the office of the priest; but the power [jus] of the Holy Ghost is in loosing and binding sins; how then do they [the Novatians] claim *His*

and the power to forgive sins. It was one of the expedients to which the Novatians were brought, when the Church, against their hard-hearted heresy, urged her Divine commission to remit sins, that they limited our Lord's words to the commission to baptize, although in these words He saith nothing of that commission, and in giving that commission He used none of the words or actions which He here employeth. They interlaced the two narratives of the Gospels, in order that no power might seem to be conveyed by the one, besides what was given in the other. "Thou joinest together," says S. Pacian ²

gift, Whose right and power they mistrust? St. Ambr. de Pœnit. 1, 2, § 8. "In that He said, 'Receive the Holy Ghost,' it appears plainly, that they do not this thing of themselves, but the Holy Spirit through them, as He saith in another place, 'It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.' But the Holy Ghost is in such wise present in the Pre-late or Minister of the Church, that if he be not a hypocrite, the Spirit worketh through him, and his reward to everlasting salvation, and their regeneration or edification, who, through him, are either consecrated, or have the Gospel preached. But if he be a hypocrite, (since most truly is it written, 'the Holy Spirit of discipline will flee the deceitful,') the Holy Spirit is wanting to his salvation, withdrawing Himself from thoughts which are without understanding, but He forsaketh not His ministry, whereby through him He worketh the salvation of others." S. Aug. c. Ep. Parm. ii. § 24.

² Ep. 3, ad Sympr. § 25, p. 347, (where he argues more at length). The Novatian is exactly followed by Chemnitz, Exam. Concil. Trid. 6; Sess. 4, Can. 1, 2, and Zwingli (see note B, p. 75). Calvin also limits John xx. 28, to Baptism; Antid. Conc. Trid. sess. 4, c. 15; Opp. T. 8. p. 247.

to the Novatian, “ clauses from two Evangeliſts, ſo as to ſeem one. What ſayeſt thou? Do the two Evangeliſts relate meanings, mutually halved between them, and but half entire? Were they mutually deficient in language or in reaſon? Or did not in each the Holy Spirit fill the whole man, carrying out entirely the ſenſe propoſed, and defining the words even to the full?”]

But when we underſtand our Bleſſed Lord in the plain meaning of His words, of a power lodged in His Church to forgive ſins in His Name, then the very words themſelves expreſs the fulneſs of the pardon. As our Lord ſent His Apoſtles in the ſame way in which the Father had ſent Him, ſo the word by which He expreſſes the power to forgive, is the very word by which He Himſelf forgave. “ Whoſe ſoever ſins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them” (*ἀφίενται*), is the bleſſed echo of His own words; “ Son, be of good cheer, thy ſins are forgiven thee” (*ἀφίενται*)—the very word, by which He prayed for His murderers and all penitents upon the Croſs, and teaches us in His own prayer, when we pray, to aſk for forgiveness; the very word under which He declared that “ all ſins and blaſphemy ſhall be forgiven unto men;” ſpake of the entire forgiveness by our Heavenly Father to thoſe who forgive; for the fulneſs of which the Scribes diſputed His authority, “ Who is this that forgiveth ſins alſo?” by which He claimed that power to Himſelf, “ That ye may know that the Son of Man

hath power upon earth to forgive sins³;" and now in the same words He leaves it to those, whom He left in His Name to carry on His work on earth. But if any would restrain this to the Apostles only, "why," as S. Pacian⁴ says, "do they not in the like way restrain Baptism also?" Either, both were confined to the Apostles only, or both were committed to that Church with which our Lord promised to be "always to the end of the world;" by Baptism, to remit all sin original or actual; by Absolution, to remit all which, by the frailty of our nature, any may afterwards contract; by Baptism to bring into His fold, by Absolution to restore those who had wandered from it.

What sins then may there be remitted? All which are not excepted; and these are none. "He saith," says S. Pacian⁵, "'whatsoever ye shall loose.' He excepted nothing whatever. 'Whatsoever,' He says, great or small." ["God," saith S. Ambrose⁶, "maketh no distinction, Who promised His mercy unto all, and without any exception granted to His priests the power of loosing. Only whoso hath heaped up sin, let him heap up penitence; for greater sins are washed away with greater tears."] All may be forgiven, for which God puts into the heart the desire to be forgiven. The unpardonable

³ Matt. ix. 2, &c. Luke xxiii. 24. Matt. vi. 12, &c. xii. 31, &c. vi. 12, 14, 15. Luke vi. 37. vii. 49. Matt. ix. 6, &c.

⁴ Ep. 1, ad Sympr. § 11, 12.

⁵ Ep. iii. 27.

⁶ De Pœnit. i. 3, § 10.

sin is therefore alone not forgiven ⁷, (S. Augustine says,) because the sinner asks not for forgiveness.

Nothing can be more absolute than the words, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." No sin then is excepted for its greatness; none for their multitude. He saith, "Whatsoever ye loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;" no sinner is excepted, however deeply ingrained by old, inveterate, accumulated sins; though his sins be upon him and weigh him down that he be not able to look up, and defile his memory, and cloud his faith, and destroy the power of other ordinances, and chill the heart, and weaken the will, or even bring on him relapses, let him, with earnest purpose, lay down his sin at our dear Lord's Feet, hating them for His love's sake Who has so loved him; and He has said, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them."

Nor again doth He put us off for that forgiveness to a distant day. The effects of sin upon the soul may often be to be worked out by sorrow and toil; the forfeited crown and larger favour of Almighty God to be gained by subsequent self-denial or suffering for Him or devoted service. But we have the very

⁷ Enchir. c. 83. "But he who, not believing that sins are remitted in the Church, despises so great bountifulness of the Divine gift, and in this obstinacy of mind closes his life, is guilty of that unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, in Whom Christ forgiveth sins." Add Fulgent. de Rem. Pecc. i. 24, B. P. ix. p. 219. See further, "The Unpardonable Sin," a sermon by the author.

craving of our hearts. Our sins, when we are fit to receive the blessed words, are forgiven at once. "They *are*," our gracious Lord says, "forgiven unto them (*ἀφείωνται*);" as though He would express the swiftness of His pardon, in the same way as it is promised in the Prophet, "Thou shalt call and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry and He shall say, Here I am;" so now, so soon as His Priest has, in His Name, pronounced His forgiveness on earth, the sins of the true penitent are forgiven in Heaven, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they *are* remitted unto them."

[All then combines to induce us to receive unhesitatingly the heavenly gift. Every thing in and around our Blessed Lord's words, the solemn investment of the Apostles with His own power, "As My Father sent Me, even so send I you:" the imparting of the Holy Spirit for this office, which is the work of the Spirit; the solemn simplicity and absolute distinct meaning of His words, which, taken plainly, cannot fall short of the sense in which the Church has ever understood them; the unvarying agreement of the Church in so understanding them, assure our faith that He hath not left us comfortless, but hath left others with His authority, to convey to sinners in His Name the forgiveness of their sins. And with this key, all which we might have doubted about or feared as to other Scripture, is opened to us. The fulness of the words with which our Lord gives power to remit sins, is the very antidote to the

heresy of Novatian; and those awful passages which shut out some sin, cannot exclude any sin which *can* sue for pardon, since He has said, "Whose soever sins ye remit." We see that the parables of our Lord's love for sinners apply to those too who have anew perished, since He has Himself provided for the restoration of penitents; we see that they may be at once forgiven, and so to us too belong those promises of the swift forgiveness of our sins; and we may take boldly David's words, "I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord, and so Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sins." He provides for their complete, absolute remission; so to us also are said the comfortable words of the Prophet, "Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."] The word ἀφέωνται contains in one a whole Gospel of forgiveness—a whole volume, filled within and without, and traced by the finger of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, all that the penitent's heart craves for, full, present, absolute, universal forgiveness and release.

And then, too, the Psalms which the Church daily puts into our mouths; the histories of penitents which she recites to us as ensamples; the Evangelic prophet; all, with the depth of their sorrows and the gladness of their restoration, may belong to us; all, in the words of our good Bishop Andrewes, "The writings of the law, the oracles of Prophets, the melody of Psalms, the instruction of Proverbs, the experience of Histories," each supply some separate note in the Divine harmony of that Angel-chorus,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men.”

Surely, then, our reverent Hooker⁸ has well said, “I hold it for a most infallible rule in expositions of sacred Scripture, that when a literal construction will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst.” [How is it consistent with reverence for our Blessed Lord, when He has said, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them,” to go about for meanings of His words, other than they seem to mean? Can we think that He would have used words which seem to mean so much, had He meant so little as some would understand by them? Would He who “knew what was in man,” and who came to teach us lowliness, have given to the stewards of His mysteries their commission in words so lofty, and which (as men now think) must, if taken as He spake them, foster pride? It was no new thing of which our Blessed Lord was speaking, but what He had Himself used “on earth,” the “power to forgive sins.” And now He saith to His Apostles, “As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you,” and He who on earth forgave sins, says to those whom He sent in His Name, “Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven.” Our Lord exercised on earth two personal offices, to “preach the Gospel to the poor,” and to “forgive sins.” Can we think that He would have given His Apostles their office in terms which express the one only, had He

⁸ Eccl. Pol. v. 59, 2.

meant only the other? Had He meant (as men have said), “To ⁹ whomsoever ye preach the Gospel and they believe it,” or “to ⁹ whomsoever ye shall announce remission of sins, and they shall believe the Gospel preached by you,” or “to ¹ whomsoever ye attest the remission of sins,” or “when ² ye confirm pious consciences by the promises of the Gospel in the hope of freedom and remission,” who can think that He would have expressed this by words which sound so different? A reverent mind would hardly so practise upon His words, as to say, (to which all these explanations come,) that “Go preach the Gospel” and “whose sins ye remit” are one and the same thing³.]

Why then do men shrink back from this plain meaning of our Lord’s words? Why but for some imaginations of inherent unfitness, that they cannot reconcile to themselves how we should have such treasure in earthen vessels, how this power should be intrusted to those who might not use it aright, or might make it but an occasion of sin.

[It is indeed an awful “honour,” to use the words of St. Chrysostom⁴, “which the Holy Spirit hath vouchsafed to His Priests.—While conversant here on earth, they are commissioned to dispense the things of heaven, and receive a power which God hath not

⁹ Zwingli, ad loc. See note B at the end.

¹ Musculus and Calvin, ad loc.

² Calv. Instt. iv. 1, 22.

³ Zwingli, l. c. and P. Martyr, Serm. in loc.

⁴ De Sacerdot. iii. 5. init. See Hooker, above, p. 28.

conferred on Angels or Archangels; for to them hath it not been said, ‘Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven.’”] But is it then a new thing for God to “perfect praise through babes,” or overcome wisdom by folly, or make weakness His strength? “O wretched unbelief,” says a father ⁵, “who deniest to God His own proper qualities, simplicity and power?” Is it not, on that very account, more according to all the analogy of God’s dealings since the foundation of the world? Hath not He, Who hung the earth upon nothing, and has made sand the bound of the proud waves of the sea, and man, of all the weakest, the Lord of this earthly creation, when He had breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and cast around him the robe of original innocency, hath not He ever shown His Almightyness in seeming weakness, that it might be seen that the excellency was of Him? [What were the ark of Noah, and the rod of Moses, and his feeble, upstayed, arms, which won victory over Amalek, but types of the Cross, mighty and victo-

⁵ Tert. de Bapt. c. 2. p. 256, O. T. He proceeds: “What then? Is it not wonderful that death should be washed away by a mere bath? Yea, but if, because it is wonderful, it be therefore not believed, it ought on that account the rather to be believed. For what else should the works of God be but above all wonder? We ourselves also wonder, but because we believe: while unbelief wondereth and believeth not; for it wondereth at simple things, as foolish, and at great things, as impossible.”

rious in weakness? What the line of the Redeemer's descent through the younger, as Seth, and Shem, and Abraham, and Isaac, begotten "of one as good as dead," and Jacob, and Judah, and David, and Solomon, but an image that God would choose "the weak things of the world to confound the mighty?"] When has He not used means, inadequate, in order to bring about His ends? [What was Israel itself, who were as grasshoppers in their own sight, to subdue the seven nations, images of the seven deadly sins which war against the soul, or the stone and sling of David, or "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon," or Jael, or the hornet which He sent before Israel, or the children of the barren, as Isaac, and Samuel, and John Baptist, or the "feeble Jews," through whom He restored Israel after the captivity, but preachers of the one great truth, that God brings not about His ways as our ways? So that if in any case He makes use of might, He either subdues it, and Samson's strength becomes available through the Nazarite's vow, and Moses' through old age, or it is a type of Anti-Christ, hating Him, while serving His ends in purifying His people. What more strange thing is it, that He, through the voice of a man, should forgive sins, than that through clay, which would blind, He should give sight, or, through stopping the ears, should open them: or that His Voice should awaken the dead, who of themselves could not hear it; or that He should command the winds and sea, and they should obey Him?] How is it stranger than that the Lord should

hearken to the voice of a man, and the sun obey the voice of him who said, "Sun, stand thou still;" or that, through the indwelling of His Spirit, the voice of the tent-maker in bonds should make Felix tremble, and almost persuade a king in his pomp to belong to the "sect every where spoken against," or subdue the Imperial City, and silence the wise of this world, and run through the world, making Jew, and Greek, and Barbarian, obedient to the faith⁶? "It is not ye that speak," saith our Lord, "but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." "That man from the earth," says S. Gregory the Great⁷, "might have so great power, the Creator of heaven and earth came to earth from heaven, and that the flesh might judge spirits, the Lord, made Flesh for man, vouchsafed to bestow this upon him, because thereby did human weakness rise beyond itself, that Divine Might was made weak below Itself." It may be one of the fruits of the Incarnation, and a part of the dignity thereby conferred upon our nature, that God would rather work His miracles of grace through man, than immediately by Himself. It may be part of the Mystery of the Passion, that God would rather bestow Its

⁶ See the magnificent passage of S. Chrys. Hom. 32, on Rom. xvi. 24. p. 506, sqq. Oxf. Tr.

⁷ Dial. ii. 23, add S. Hilary, in Ps. 67, § 35. "When He saith to Peter, and the rest of the Apostles, 'Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,' it is a Voice full of power, to be able to bestow so much on human weakness."

fruits, through those who can suffer with us, through toil and suffering, than without them. It may be part of the purpose of His Love, that love should increase while one member suffers with another, and relieves another. [Yet certainly such a “ministry of reconciliation” He hath not committed to the Angels who rejoice over it, as neither by them, but “through the Priests of God,” says S. Chrysostom⁸, “do we put on Christ, are buried with the Son of God, and become members of that Blessed Head,” Christ Jesus; “by them,” he says, “we are not only regenerated, but the sins after this they have power to remit.”]

God, indeed, when He intrusteth man with His Divine Authority, doth not part with it so as to confirm that which through the sin, either of him who useth it, or him for whom it is used, is done contrary to His Will. “Pardon,” says S. Pacian⁹, “is in such wise not refused to true penitence, as that no one thereby prejudgeth the future Judgment of Christ.” “We do not,” says S. Cyprian¹, “anticipate the judgment of the Lord Who will come to judge, but that, if He shall find a sinner’s penitence full and entire, He will then ratify what has been determined by us. But if any have deluded us by a feigned penitence, God, Who ‘is not mocked,’ and

⁸ De Sacerdot. iii. 6.

⁹ Ep. 1, ad Sympr. fin. p. 327.

¹ Ep. 55, § 15, p. 126. Comp. § 24, p. 135. Ep. 57, § 3, p. 139 and 30, § 11, p. 68.

Who 'looketh on the heart' of man, will judge of those whom we have not seen through, and the Lord will correct the sentence of His servants." Yet doth not God less, through His servants, what is done aright in His Name, because others speak in that Name perversely. He spake through His true Prophets, although others whom He sent not, in His Name "prophesied deceits;" He said to His Priests, "Ye are gods," giving sentence through the Name of God; although to such as judged unjustly, He said, "Ye shall die like men." Baptism is not less "the laver of regeneration," because it benefits not those who receive it feignedly; nor is the Holy Eucharist less the Bread of Life, because to those "who will presume to receive it unworthily," "it doth nothing else than increase their damnation." He doth not the less speak through those who preach His Gospel, because others "proclaim" or preach "Christ out of envy and strife;" nor doth He less by the Church loose true penitents, because they who come feignedly to His Ordinance, do, by this fresh sin, but rivet all their former sins faster upon them.

My whole object, brethren, in all this which I would say, is the comfort of penitents, according to the provisions which our Church has made for them. Elsewhere² I have sought, from the practice of primitive Antiquity, to vindicate the practical

² Note M on Tertullian, p. 379, sqq. (Library of the Fathers.)

state of our Church, in which confession is dispensed with as matter of necessity, and left to the consciences of individuals. Yet certainly they who leaving private confession discretionary, put their hand to the work of restoring public discipline, thought not that things would be amongst us as they now are; for Ridley spake of public discipline as “one ³ of the marks whereby the true Church is known in this dark world,” and Latimer⁴ (with others) saith, “To speak of right and true Confession, I would to God it were kept in England; for it is a good thing.” Yet God, Who in His Wisdom suffered their designs to come to nought ⁵, has thereby the more cast the Church upon herself, and we may trust, would make her discipline the purer, in that He has deprived her of all outward aid in restoring it. And we may even be thankful that the rules which remain ⁶, requiring all her members to partake of her ordinances, have passed into disuse. For this is most certain, that to encourage indiscriminately the approach to the Holy Communion, without a corresponding inward system

³ Certaine Conferences betwene Dr. N. Ridley and Mr. H. Latimer, quoted in Wordsworth, App. p. 135.

⁴ Serm. on the Third Sunday after Epiph. quoted by Wordsworth, App. p. 69, and Ridley, *ib.* p. 71.

⁵ See the account of the several attempts to restore public discipline frustrated, Wordsworth, App. p. 41, *sqq.*

⁶ See 8th Rubric, at the end of the Communion Service, and Can. 22.

whereby they, who are entitled so to do, should know intimately the hearts of those whom they so encourage, has brought with it an amount of carelessness and profanation, which, if known, would make many a heart of those who have so done, sink and quake.

It is, then, we may trust, of God's manifold mercy to this portion of His Church, that He has, at the same time, by His Providence allowed almost all remains of that outward compulsory system to be broken down; and by His Spirit within has aroused, and is arousing, people's consciences more and more, to desire the full provisions which He has laid up in her for wounded souls. For so shall the whole be the more seen to be His work, and discipline be not the constraint of the disobedient, but, as oftentimes in the oldest times⁷, the longed-for refuge of earnest minds, the binding-up of the broken-hearted, the austere yet loved chastisement of the flesh, "that the soul may be saved in the Day of the Lord." We can bear no sudden restoration. But in this and all things we need but patiently to wait for His Hand, Who is so graciously and wonderfully restoring us. That type of fatherly rule must be the characteristic of our Church; "*volentes per populos dat jura.*" "The people shall be willing in the day of Thy power."

⁷ See notices of voluntary confession with a view to public penitence, in note M on Tertullian, S. Aug. de quæstt. 83. q. 26. Serm. 232, § 8. 351. de Pœnit. § 7, and Hooker, vi. 4. 6.

We must patiently await, until God gives to parents more anxious care for their children, or more confidence in her ministers, or to us more skill in guarding the souls of youth. All will be well with our Church, if man outruns not by his impatience the deep, orderly movements of the Spirit of God. Yet since on this very subject, unhappily a vague suspicion in general prevails among us, and this is fostered now by the circulation of the work of an infidel⁸ of impure mind in another land, we need the more the common warning, which has been raised again and again during the three last centuries⁹, that amid any corrupt abuses, through man's

⁸ Michelet. His work bears no appearance of being founded upon facts as to the abuse of this sacred office. It is the theory of an irreligious mind passing judgment upon holy relations, which, being unholy, it cannot understand (1 Cor. ii. 14); viewing spiritual things through the medium of a carnal mind, and hating the Priestly Office, as being an opposing influence, necessarily, if it is faithful, at war with "the world."

⁹ See in Wordsworth's Sermon and Appendix, *Bp. Andrewes* (p. 73), *Overall* (p. 74), *Moreton* (p. 76), *Dr. Donne* (p. 78), *Abp. Ussher*, *Bramhall* (p. 79), *Bp. Cosin* (p. 81), *Heylin*, *Hammond* (p. 83), *Bp. Taylor* (p. 89), *South*, *Hickes*, *Collier*, *Marshall*, and add *Bp. Sparrow* (Serm. on Confession of sins and the power of Absolution). "Confess, as the Church directs us; confess to God, confess also to the Priest, if not in private in the ear, since that is out of use (*male aboletur*, saith a devout Bishop, it is almost quite lost, the more is the pity); yet, however, confess as the Church appoints, publicly before the congregation, that so we may, at least by this, reap the great benefit of Absolution." Hooker's description of the ground of *voluntary* Con-

wickedness, of the individual application of the power of the keys, we ourselves lose not its healthful use. According to the state of the Church, the influence of the Clergy must raise or depress the people committed to their charge; they will, by God's appointment and gracious help, aid to lift them up towards Heaven, or with them they will sink deeper into Hell. And the more sacred and nearer the intercourse, the more blessed must it be, or the more deadly. But whatsoever may be conceived of evil, in any state of the Church, from men of corrupt

fession in the Ancient Church implies much sympathy with it (vi. 4. 7). "Because the knowledge how to handle our own sores is no vulgar or common art, but we either carry towards ourselves for the most part an over-soft and gentle hand, fearful of touching too near the quick; or else, endeavouring not to be partial, we fall into timorous scrupulosities, and sometimes into those extreme discomforts of mind, from which we hardly do lift up our heads again; men thought it the safest way to disclose their secret faults, and to crave imposition of penance from them whom our Lord Jesus Christ hath left in His Church to be spiritual and ghostly physicians, the guides and pastors of redeemed souls, whose office doth not only consist in general persuasions unto amendment of life, but also in the private particular cure of diseased minds." The case in which he recommends Confession, he thus describes (vi. 4. 16). "If peace with God do not follow the pains we have taken in seeking after it, if we continue disquieted, and not delivered from anguish, mistrusting whether what we do be sufficient: it argueth that our sore doth exceed the power of our own skill, and that the wisdom of the pastor must bind up those parts, which, being bruised, are not able to be recured of themselves."

minds, ravening wolves in sheep's clothing, there is the less fear, when God is restoring her; whatever danger there may be, in any case, lest an unskilful Priest should convey knowledge of evil to the soul, instead of guarding it, (and too scrupulous tender care of this there cannot be, aided by constant prayer to God,) *our* peril lies not here. We are not in peril where we fear, but where we fear not. Our peril is from that, which Satan through these fears would the more hide from us, the unhindered tide of corruption, which sweeps away its tens of thousands, where the heart, unopened to parent or Priest, does lie open to Satan's snares. Meantime, there is the more exceeding reason for more earnest prayer to God, to break this power and malice of Satan, and strengthen His own kingdom in the hearts of men.

But, meantime, neither this nor aught besides for which our good Bishop Andrewes prayed, as things yet "lacking to us¹," should have any weight in diminishing the comfort of any in this our portion of the Church, in which God has bestowed upon us so many blessings from our childhood until now. It has been well said, "Pray to God for a guide, and He will give thee a guide, or Himself will guide thee." He Who is stirring people's souls to long to disburthen themselves, will not fail, among us, the

¹ Devotions, 2nd day. See Serm. iv., on Whitsunday, quoted by Wordsworth, App. p. 73, &c.

hearts which He hath stirred. He will not, through our unskilfulness, be wanting to His own Ordinance. Meantime, it is certain by the consent of the Universal Church, that whoso is truly contrite of any the most deadly sin,—all, which the Ancient Church subjected to years of penitence, and then by imposition of hands formally restored, yea, if he had on him the sins of the whole world, and longeth for Absolution, is absolved. And if the comfort is for a time withheld, while as yet he knows not to whom to turn, who knows what deeper penitence God may not amid this suspense be working in his soul? God's delays are man's benefits. "Ask, and ye shall receive."

Then, too, as penitence deepens, the daily and Eucharistic absolutions will come with greater power to the soul. If now to many they seem to avail but little, it is not that the Absolution is powerless, but that repentance, upon which alone it is bestowed, is cold. If, indeed, "with *heartly* repentance and true faith we turn unto Him," if "the remembrance of our sins is indeed grievous unto us, and the burden of them intolerable," His mercy will not be wanting to us, His absolving sentence belongs directly to us. "When," in the words of Hooker², "in the confession, every man prostrate, as it were, before His glorious Majesty, crieth 'guilty' against himself, and the minister with one sentence pronounceth

² B. vi. 4. 15. Comp. Dr. Bisse, note A at the end.

universally all clear, whose acknowledgment so made hath proceeded from a true penitent mind ; what reason is there every man should not, under the general terms of confession, represent to himself his own particulars whatsoever, and adjoining thereunto that affection which a contrite spirit worketh, embrace to as full effect the words of Divine Grace, as if the same were severally and particularly uttered with addition of prayers, imposition of hands, or all the ceremonies and solemnities that might be used for the strengthening of men's affiance in God's peculiar mercy towards them ?”

Yet this very restoration brings new and difficult duties upon us to whom God has entrusted that most solemn and Divine office. There is no choice. Consciences are daily awakened by God's Spirit, some to the knowledge of a frightful past, others, it may be, are unduly burthened. Satan, in the absence of skilful advisers, who might guard the soul against evil, at first subtle, but very desolating, has spread his snares with a dreadful wisdom. Luxury, and the sins of a self-indulgent people, the corruption transmitted from one brief generation of youth to another, or self-originated through the early deceits of Satan, have spread among us a widely-wasting mass of evil, unknown mostly, unwarned against, and therefore the more destructive. Too many know how sin, commenced with scarce the knowledge that it was sin, has, for years of life, cankered

every purpose of good ; perhaps prepared for deeper, more overt, deadly sin !

Yet, whether of such or of any other sins, the more God brings before the souls of men the awful reality of our existence, and the endless bliss or woe which hangs upon this life's breath, the deeper and more frequent must be the longing of men to disburthen their souls. With deeper sense of the sinfulness of sin, needs, new to us, but for which our Church provides, have sprung up. And we, in our several callings, must not (if we would have the blessing of God) be wanting either to the Church, or to "the sheep³ of Christ whom He bought with His Death, and for whom He shed His Blood." Yet, blessed as the office is, and like our Blessed Lord's own, to relieve the burden of the clogged and choked heart by receiving it, still, from the experience of those who have exercised that holy ministry, it must be said that there is none so full of peril to those who have not, by penitence and mortification, or the continual sanctifying grace of God, or some sharp, penetrating, severing stroke, been deadened to the things of time, and, in the full aim and desire of their heart, are seeking to live to God. Sin is an awful thing to handle. To hear of it continually, and not be defiled with it nor dulled to it ; to compassionate a fellow-sinner and be austere with self ; to hear of the defilement of every sense,

³ Exhortation in "The Ordering of Priests."

and keep watch over his own, comes not from man himself, but from the continued, preserving, guarding, refreshing grace of God, which keeps the whole man stayed upon, looking to, sealed by, Him. It is, then, a call the more to us so to cleave fast to God, that those committed to our charge may rightly place trust in us, to be jealously watchful over ourselves, guard speech⁴ habitually, if we are to receive the solemn secrets of men's inmost souls; train ourselves in holy discipline, that we may be fitted to train others, not be blind leaders of the blind; strict with ourselves, that we may know how to be tenderly careful of others; hate all the motions of sin in ourselves, that we may teach others to hate it with a holy shrinking; be fervent ourselves, that we may inspire others with a holy fervour; love Him much, Who, we trust, hath forgiven us, that we may teach others, being much forgiven, much to love; and study deep humility and fervent prayer, lest we fall into any snare of the Devil. For as the reward is great, so is the peril. And it may often be de-

⁴ This is a general caution only to persons, who may as yet not have exercised the office. It does not imply (as a Roman Catholic writer has interpreted it) any misgiving, that the sacredness of confession would not be kept among us. Violation of confession would be avoided like any other sin, and hindered by the grace of God. But there are many ways, short of any thing so shocking and inconceivable, as direct violation of such a secret, against which all writers on Confession give cautions, as the *Prêtre Sanctifié*, Liguori, S. Charles Borromeo, B. Leonard in the "*Manuel des Confesseurs*," p. 467, sqq.

sirable that before any exercise the Physician's office, (although none from the sense of their own unworthiness should refuse it in case of need,) he should himself lay open some festering, oppressive, sin of his own bosom.

Nor is this increase of the individual application of the "power of the keys" among us, any (so to speak) new and untried use of what lies in the letter of our Liturgy. It was used in times past, nor ever wholly disused, however overlaid in the lukewarmness of the last century, or overlooked in the revival of piety, when, at first, it took a direction too little influenced by the provisions of our Church. And now, again, its increased use has not been the result of any theory, or of any wish on the part of any of the priesthood, to restore what they thought to be for the benefit of the Church. It originated not in the agency of man, but in the Grace and Providence of Almighty God, shaking the inmost souls of penitents, and giving them the longing for that relief which He has appointed.

And as this, amidst the manifold distresses of this time, is a great encouragement⁵ and hope for the future, (for what is from Him must prosper,) so too are the blessed fruits, which all have seen who in

⁵ "The Church rightly claims the power of binding and loosing, as having true priests; heresy cannot claim it, not having priests of God. And by not claiming, it pronounces against itself, in that, not having priests, it dare not claim to itself the priestly rights." S. Ambr. de Sacr. i. 2. § 7.

these later days have been called upon to exercise this sacred ministry. For gifts of grace are not of man, but the operation of our Blessed Lord, through the Holy Spirit, sanctioning among us the commission which He gave. [And so, too, may they who have witnessed this grace and gift of God, perhaps speak more to the hearts of the penitent. For it is one thing to have heard by the hearing of the ear that such gifts are owned and imparted by the Church; another to know what God hath wrought by them for human souls: one thing even (as all we who have received the holy office of the Priesthood) to have heard those solemn words, the continual echo of our Blessed Lord's, yea, His own by His servants the Bishops to us, by which it was conveyed to each of us, and at which our souls stood in awe and were amazed: "Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed to thee by the imposition of our hands: Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven;" one thing to have received this holy office, as a dormant power though inherent in us, another to have seen the fruits of the gift of God, although imparted through a sinner's hands. In this way, the Ministers of Christ may venture to say, "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen."]

And if any here feel the burden of past sin, some single, heavier sin, as a load upon his conscience, or some enduring evil habit, or a subtle ensnaring offence, again and again rising up against

him, and mastering him, or some hateful spell of past evil doing, which seems to leave his soul in darkness, and paralyze him as to all more holy, devoted purposes;—it may be a blessed knowledge that others, like him, were once bound, and now have by God been loosed; they, like him, were once burdened, and now their lightened hearts mount up in love and thankfulness: they were once slaves of sin, now are the freedmen of God: they once strove ineffectually, struggling for a while, yet ever in the end dragged captive; now they strive victoriously in the Peace, and Light, and Love of God.

It is one of the especial blessings of this place that each is assigned to the care of one who, by his sacred office, is bound to care for his soul. Blessed as that relation has been to many of us, more blessed far might it be to the young, would they recollect that they, with whom they are brought into this relation, are not mere guardians of discipline, but Ministers of God. And if the soul of any be burthened, they are, by the very name of their office⁶, protectors, guardians, and in the place of parents. We need no new relations, but to bring into fuller life what God has given us.

Great is the grace which God oftentimes bestows, through the power of the keys, upon true penitence, which loveth or but longeth to love. He Who giveth to every one severally as He willeth, dealeth

⁶ Tutores.

with each as He, in His Infinite Mercy and Wisdom, sees best for the needs of each, or as each is at the time fitted to receive of His Goodness. Nor must any be disappointed, if, for the time, he be even rather bewildered with the memory and multitude of his sins, or with the shame of their confession, than perceive any instant relief. Yet none in earnest ever "asked bread" of our "Heavenly Father," and "He gave them a stone;" none ever with penitent heart approached His Ordinances in His Church, and was "sent away empty." He giveth according to our longing. He Himself hath said, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it:" the greater our longing for His grace, the larger His grace. His Infinite Love has no bounds, but the narrowness of our souls, which, if we crave it, He will enlarge. To some He sheddeth rays of light on their darkness; to others He gives large, sensible influxes of grace, so that they seem borne along it as upon a tide; to others He poureth in the gift of love; to some He giveth another heart and maketh them other men, so that former sins, former besetting temptations, are, as it were, passed away; to others He giveth the grace of strength; to others a loving penitence; to others deep humility and loathing of sin; to others the brightness of His Presence, and the souls as of a little child. Yet all such gifts are of God's overflowing mercy; one only gift doth the penitent seek after, the Face of God; that He Who turned His Face away amid his sins, will

“show the Light of His Countenance upon him, that he may be whole.”

The restoration, on the part of God, if we be sincere, is complete. “I set before you,” says S. Chrysostom⁷, “not one, two, three, but many thousands, ulcered, wounded, laden with countless sins, which can be so made whole through penitence, as not to have trace or scar of their former wounds.” “Scars remain⁸ in the body; God, when He effaces sin, allows neither scar nor trace to remain, but with health gives freshness of beauty⁹ too; with freedom from punishment, righteousness also; and makes the sinner equal to those who had not sinned;” nay, not “equal” may he be, but, says S. Gregory¹⁰, “a life on fire with love after sin, becometh more pleasing to God than innocence which through security is listless.” Only be it an ardent, kindled, fiery life, which willeth not that any of its dross, any thing dead, remain unconsumed.

What the Church offers, is not to replace penitence (as many modern systems do), but to secure its fruits; not to diminish sorrow for past sin, but to make it joyous; not to offer easy terms, but to invite to the yoke of Christ, easy, but as freeing thee from the heavy yoke of sin; easy, because He Who placeth it upon thee, shall by it uphold thee. The Church every where has in later times

⁷ De Pœnit. Hom. 8, § 3.

⁸ Ibid. § 2.

⁹ Εὐμορφία.

¹⁰ Past. c. 28.

mitigated her strictness¹, and because she could not bring us to the severe self-discipline of the Ancient Church, would invite us, as children with weak wills, to do what we can.

She abridges the long-protracted period of penitential acts; admits at once, or rarely excludes from communion; disuses almost every where the recommendation of the stern instruments of ancient penitence, [such as even the loving, though earnest, S. Cyprian² speaks of, and of which our own Church³ spoke with reverence at the beginning of the last century, "to spend nights in vigils and weeping, lie stretched on the ground, prostrate themselves amongst ashes, sackcloth, and dust," or long-continued fastings.] In compassion to the weakness of her children, she

¹ "The Apostle doth not speak contrary to the Lord, in that he says, 'Those that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear,' whereas He saith, 'Rebuke him between him and thee alone.' Both are to be done, as the difference of the infirmity of those suggests, whom we have received in charge, not to be destroyed, but to be corrected and cured; for one is to be healed one way, another another." S Aug. de Fid. et Op. § 4.

² De Laps. § 21, p. 175, Oxf. Tr.

³ Form of Excommunication approved by Convocation, A.D. 1712. Archiep. Cant. Th. Tenison, 20 Reg. Ang. Ann. 13, quoted by Wordsworth, App. p. 35. It refers to the yet stronger language of Origen, Tertullian, and S. Ambrose (ibid. p. 37). The language of Tertullian is quoted with respect by Bishop Hall (against the Brownists), on the Right Use of the Church. P. ii. p. 162. (Ibid. p. 78.) See also Bp. Sparrow, Sermon on Confession and Absolution (at the end of his Rationale), p. 307, ed. 1722.

puts them not to open shame, nor lays upon them the burden of a heavy discipline. But God changeth not; His holy Word remains, which counts self-“revenge” among the fruits of “sorrow after a godly sort:” the Church still rehearses to us from it the austere humiliation of Ahab and Nineveh; she still teaches us to say with the royal penitent, “every night wash I my bed, and water my couch with my tears;” “my beauty is gone for very trouble;” “I forget to eat my bread;” “for the voice of my groaning, my bones will scarcely cleave to my flesh;” she, yea, God by her, still calls to us through the Prophets, to “turn to the Lord with weeping, and with fasting, and with mourning.” Not the Nature of the Unchangeable God, nor of His and our unchanged adversary, fixed in everlasting hate of both, and hating us the more, as bearing the image of God; not the deadly nature of sin, nor the true character of healthful penitence are changed; not what would be good for us, if we could bear it, but what our sickly wills (and in some cases, weaker frames) will bear. Better to repent any how, than not to repent at all. Yet surely they may most hope that their penitence is sincere whom it costs most; “the pains of the penitent,” says S. Augustine⁴, “are birth-pangs of a woman with child;” yielding, for short present pain, abiding joy. They surely, who mourn most deeply, shall be most deeply comforted;

⁴ In Ps. xlvii. § 5.

“they who sow in tears, shall reap in joy;” they who, “weeping, bear forth good seed, shall come again” to their Father’s everlasting home “with joy,” and shall find their sheaves laid up in His garner. They, who have deeply fallen, or have turned aside, must gird themselves the more resolutely, and strip themselves of every weight, and press the more earnestly in His Blessed Steps Who hath anew called them, would they gain the Prize they once forfeited, the full Brightness of His Presence in bliss, and recover the jewels of that crown which they once tarnished, or “cast on the ground, profaning it down to the dust,” and the mire of concupiscence!

[Who among us shall dare to say that that, if it can be borne, is without its use, which the whole Church so earnestly commended to penitents, to further their salvation, in those centuries, to which, on this very matter of discipline, our own Homilies refer, as “the⁵ days when religion was the most pure?” Which is most like the penitence of Holy Scripture or our own Commination Service, that which speaks of “prayers⁶ without ceasing, frequent fastings,” “to groan, to weep, to moan day and night before the Lord his God;” “as we have sinned greatly, greatly to weep;” or even those more painful, humiliating acts, the sackcloth and ashes which God accepted in Nineveh, and which our Lord names as

⁵ Homily of the right use of the Church, Pt. 2.

⁶ Tertull. de Pœnit. c. 9, quoted in the Form of Excommunication, l. c., and S. Cyprian, l. c.

tokens of humble, acceptable penitence⁷; or that which holds, that the guilt of having “defiled the temple of the Holy Ghost,” “crucified the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame, and done despite to the Spirit of grace,” may be effaced by a simple act of faith, without deep, searching, because loving, penitence? Did the Saints and Fathers of the Church set the penitents they cherished on useless toils? Were all those penitential tears not stored up in His bottle, those sighs not recorded in His Book? Those cries for mercy, were they needless or unheeded? Had penitents of old no reward, and was all they did and sought for a dream? or are we losing our reward, and, in our self-indulgence, “walking to and fro in a vain show,” a dreamy existence, which, “in the Awakening, God will despise?”].

God is anew calling aloud to penitence. Evil days, perhaps the last strife before His Coming, are gathering thick upon us. He, by the manifold evils around us, is telling us where any, who, when called by Him to work, once said, “I will not,” and have “not kept their own vineyard,” may now, if they repent, go and work in the vineyard of the Lord. Every where around, our crowded cities, our mines, our ports, our manufactories, are one wide desolation, often, except in the suspension of punishment, the types of Hell, for lack of devoted, self-

⁷ Matt. xi. 12. Luke x. 13.

denying service. Let those follow easy paths, who have ever trod the paths of God! let those who have ever led blameless lives, and have little stained their Baptismal robes, if God call them not, possess in thankfulness, life's pure, peaceful, joys! But if thou trustest that God has forgiven thee, or will forgive thee, much, then seek how thou mayest show forth to Him much contrition and much love; if thou trust that thou art "a brand plucked out of the fire," then see how, by what self-denial, parting with this world's goods or comforts, thou mayest, under God, aid to pluck others out of that fire which thou feelest that thou didst deserve: if thou hope, that when thou hadst made thyself "a vessel of wrath fitted for destruction," "dishonouring thine own self," "Jesus Christ" willing to "show forth in" thee "all long-suffering," would make of thee "a vessel of mercy prepared unto glory," "sanctified and meet for the Master's use,"—then, like him, the chief of penitents, the "chosen vessel to bear" his Redeemer's "Name before the Gentiles," be thou ready to "suffer for" His "Name's sake:" be thou "in labours more abundant; in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness;" yea, blessed shalt thou be, if, with him, thou be "in deaths oft;" that so in that body, which thou once didst "yield as the instrument of unrighteousness unto sin," and through "sin, unto death," thou mayest now "bear about the dying of the Lord

Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in thy body," and while "death worketh in" thee, "life may work" in them who through thee shall know Him. Turn thy self-affliction to the good of thy brethren: show unto Christ, in His and thy brethren, the love wherewith thou hopest He hath loved thee; and thy displeasure at thy sins shall be the good pleasure of thy God; thy labour to efface thy past foulness, shall, through the Blood of Christ, win for thee everlasting beauty and glory: He Whose strength is made perfect in weakness, shall make thy past weakness the means of thy future strength: the memory of past sin, when thou art loosed from it, shall be, not a clog to hold thee back, but a spur to goad thee: He Who now saith, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," shall own the good deeds which He gave thee strength to do: He Who shall now say to thee by His Minister, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee," shall, in the awful Day, when He shall be revealed in flaming fire, to take vengeance on those who obey not His Gospel, but to be glorified in His Saints,—He shall by Himself say unto thee, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Unto which He, of His infinite Mercy, bring us sinners, to Whom with the Father, &c.

NOTES.

NOTE A.

The following passage from Dr. Bisse's Sermon "on the Beauty of Holiness¹," reached the writer from an unknown friend. It takes the same view of the public absolution as Hooker (p. 53), and is the rather added, because until individual confession is more common, it may often be a very great comfort thus to include each person's own burden of sin in the general Confession; it will be more real, and the absolution more availing. And also any one who does use private Confession, will still, in any interval, find it very useful and comfortable to include specially the sins of the day or week in the public Confession, then receiving the Absolution as said to himself.

"This Confession is in its form most solemn, in its extent most comprehensive; for it takes in all kinds of sin, both of omission, in 'leaving undone those things which we ought to have done;' and of commission, in 'doing those things which we ought not to have done.' And whilst every single person makes this general Confession with his lips, he may make a particular Confession with his heart; I mean of his own personal sins, known only to God and himself, which if particularly, though secretly, confessed and repented of, will assuredly be forgiven. For every Church or House of Prayer is dedicated to God, with the same privileges as was Solomon's temple, to wit, [1 Kings viii. 38,] that '*Whatever supplication be made by any man, or*

¹ Sermon ii. page 25. (Edition, London, 1716.)

by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and shall spread forth his hands towards this house, then hear, O Lord, from heaven, and forgive: for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of the children of Men.' This then is the privilege of our Confession, that under the general form every man may mentally unfold '*the plague of his own heart,*' his particular sins, whatever they be, as effectually to God, Who '*Alone knoweth his heart,*' as if he pronounced them in express words. . . . (page 28.) This Confession of Sins being duly made by the whole congregation, then the Priest standing up, doth, in the Name and by the Commission of God, pronounce the Absolution; which, if rightly understood, believed, and embraced by the Confessing Penitent, ought to be of like comfort to him, as that declaration of Christ was to the man sick of the palsy [Matt. ix. 2], '*Be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee.*' For all the three forms of Absolution in our service, namely, this now before us, and that in the Communion, and the other in the Visitation of the Sick, though differing in expression, are by the best expositors on our Liturgy judged to be of equal signification. 'All these forms,' (saith Bishop Sparrow,) 'are but several expressions of the same thing, in the sense and virtue are the same, and are effectual to the penitent by virtue of that commission, (mentioned John xx. 23,) '*Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted.*' And 'tis upon this account that the Church hath not allowed this form of Absolution to be pronounced by a Deacon, to whom that Commission is not given; but hath reserved it to the Priests, who at their Ordination are invested with that authority. . . . (p. 35.) But before we enter upon it, let us observe the fitness and the necessity of this order, which appoints confession of sin with Absolution to bear the first part in our public worship. For till our persons be sanctified, absolved, and reconciled unto God, all we do in His sanctuary will be unacceptable. . . . (page 36.) Confession of sin, then, strengthened by Absolution, being the main groundwork of public worship, upon which the

acceptableness of the following service regularly depends; as I hope this will excuse my being so full and particular upon these heads, so I must crave leave, before I proceed, to leave upon your minds two exhortations.

“First, to thank God that in our worship this groundwork is not only of a tried soundness and of a just breadth, but also laid in its proper place (page 37.) Secondly, let me exhort you to come to Church before the Confession, otherwise you lose the great benefit of Absolution. For though there be other short Confessions of Sin, as in the Litany, yet there is appointed no other Absolution. I call the benefit of Absolution great, because it sanctifies your persons, which sanctifies all your offerings. To set this in a true emblem before you, which may justly affect and last upon your thoughts: every person, when he stands before God, is to be looked upon, like Joshua the High Priest, as ‘*clothed in filthy garments.*’ But after he hath confessed and repented of his sins, then the Lord saith to the Priest appointed to pronounce the Absolution,—as he did to those that stood by Joshua,—‘*Take away the filthy garments from him*’ (Zech. iii. 4). And to the person himself thus absolved he saith, as he did to Joshua, ‘*Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.*’ They therefore that come in after Absolution,—however they may come prepared and arrayed in their own righteousness,—yet ought to look upon themselves still as ‘*clothed in filthy garments.*’ For, what is all our righteousness in the sight of God? The Prophet answers (Isa. lxiv. 6), it is ‘*as filthy rags.*’”

NOTE B.

Reformed and Socinian Expositions of our Lord’s words on the
“power of the keys,” on p. 42.

Zwingli does give this as an actual paraphrase of our Lord’s words. “It is as though Christ said, ‘*To whomsoever ye preach the Gospel, and they receive it, to them sins are remitted.*’ For,

in the last chapter of Mark, He expresses this *more clearly*: ‘Preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth shall be saved;’ i. e. whoso believeth the Gospel preached by you. The remitting of sins then is ascribed to the Apostles, *because they preach that through which sins are remitted*; for they preach the Gospel, or Christ Himself, or the grace of God through Christ, by which sins are remitted. The meaning then is, ‘Whose sins ye remit,’ i. e. ‘to whom ye shall announce the remission of sins, and they shall believe the Gospel preached by you, to them sins are remitted.’” (In Hist. Dom. Res.) *Calvin* very remarkably avoids any thing like an attempt to adapt such a sense to the words, and uses general terms only; as (Institt. iv. 1. 22) “by the ministry of the Church sins are continually remitted to us, when Presbyters or Bishops, to whom this office is intrusted, confirm pious consciences, &c. (as in the text) ch. iv. 11. 1. “This command, as to remitting or retaining sins, and that promise to Peter, as to binding or loosing, ought to be referred to nothing else than the ministry of the word, which when the Lord committed to the Apostles, He therewith bestowed on them this office of binding and loosing. For what is the substance of the Gospel, except that we all, being the servants of sin and death, are loosed and freed through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus?—It is clear that in those places (Matt. xvi. John xx.) the power of the keys is *simply the preaching of the Gospel*.” The nearest to an attempt to paraphrase the words occurs ad loc. “He commands them to attest the remission of sins in His Name, so that He should through them reconcile men to God.”

In like way, *Chamier* (Panstrat. 4. 15. 3.) says that “by those words of Christ is meant the *general effect of the whole preaching of the Gospel*;” and *Peter Martyr* (Serm. in Joann. xx). “The key is twofold; the one of preaching the Word of God, the other of believing it, when heard. One doth not open nor remit sins without the other. That key is in truth nothing else than the Word of God; *not given to priests more than to others*, but to all Christians. And that Word of God is breathed upon by the

Holy Spirit, and is partly preached, partly believed; and thus sins are remitted.—The keys are the Word of God; so then the Priests need not so to boast. For there are two keys, one of teaching, the other of believing. They [the Priests] use their key; yet it is not enough to open the kingdom of heaven, unless he, too, who hears, uses his and believes. The Holy Spirit is the Author of both; for, except with His aid, people neither preach nor believe aright. Yea, when Christ preached, heaven was not opened to all by His preaching, nor were sins remitted to all, but to those only who used their key and believed. We own that by whomsoever the word of God is spoken, it is as if it was spoken out of the mouth of God; but it does not follow from this, that all have the keys. For of those who believe and hear it is said, ‘He gave them power to become the sons of God.’—Nor is the key of using the Word of God given to the Priests alone, but to the whole Church. Whence it is the Holy Spirit who giveth the keys; but all the believers have the Spirit of Christ, else are they none of His; therefore *all have the keys*. Yet all ought not, as to the outward function, to *preach* and administer sacraments; but Paul wisheth all to be done in order. Therefore certain, more learned and better, are chosen, who act for the whole Church, and are called ministers of the Church. For if we would all *preach* together, it would be a croaking of frogs. But *privately every one hath the keys towards his neighbours, and can deal with him through the Word of God, and if he lay open to him his sin, can comfort, admonish, exhort him out of the Word of God: which Word of God, if he believe, his sins are forgiven him and heaven is opened; but if he believe not, sins are retained, and he is bound.*” Chemnitz (Exam. Conc. Trid. Sess. iv. c. 1, 2). The remission and retaining of sins takes place through the ministry, (Joh. xx;) by the *preaching* of the word, Luke xxiv. *Aretius* (ad loc.) says, “the remission of sins is—that whereby we pronounce men free from the penalties of sins which the Divine vengeance would deservedly inflict. *This consists wholly in the teaching*, whereby men are taught to believe in

Christ, if they would have that remission, *and besides this, there is no lawful usage of remission.*"

The Reformed school is in this exactly followed by the early Socinian, so that (as in the case of the texts of the Scripture on Baptism, see Tracts on Holy Baptism, Note P, ed. 1) they can often not be distinguished. Thus *Schlichting* (ad loc. *Fratr. Pol.* t. 6, p. 143): "They remitted sins to all those who believed in Jesus Christ, and led a life conformably to this faith. The Apostles remitted and retained sins, both generally and in particular. In general, they remitted sins simply to all, who believed in Christ with a true and efficacious faith. In like way, they simply retained the sins of all who would not believe in Christ. Individually, they remitted sins with an 'if,' if any one professed the true faith, and had that piety which follows it," &c. (Calvin uses the same formula). "Some say that in this way any woman could remit and retain sins. This [as to the need of belief in Christ] any woman taught by the Apostles, can and ought to say and repeat; but the remitting and retaining of sins does not follow from the force of her saying, but it does from that of the Apostle's saying and teaching." *Wolzogen* (ad Matt. xvi. *Fratr. Pol.* t. 7. p. 316) "This their power consists solely in this, that, by the authority of their office, which they administered as the ambassadors of Christ, they were to announce to some, *remission of sins, to all namely, who should believe in Christ.*" *Socinus* (in Matt. xvi. 19. *Fratr. Pol.* t. i. p. 337). "I conclude, then, that the keys of the kingdom of heaven promised by Christ to Peter, are the commission to declare and pronounce as to all and every thing, which ought to be in those who appertain to the kingdom of heaven. But that the Apostles also had this same power, is very plain from what we have just said; nor is any thing more certain than that each of the Apostles *had the office of preaching the Gospel.* Moreover, we read that Christ Himself gave not to Peter only, but to the other Apostles also, this authority, that whose sins they should remit, &c., which, as it means the same as

to have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, so also does it mean the same which we said was intended by those keys; since, by the unalterable decree of God, sins are remitted to no one who believeth not in Christ, but to every one who believeth in Christ sins are remitted; and, consequently, to the one the kingdom of heaven is opened, to the other shut. This remission, then, and retaining of sins, which, being done by the Apostles, God should approve, we must needs so interpret that it should not be the act itself, but the declaration and pronouncing of it."

On the whole, the Socinian seems, on this point, rather the higher teaching; certainly higher than that of Peter Martyr.

It may further illustrate this unnatural way of interpreting Holy Scripture, to observe the violence which is done to the Sacred Narrative. S. John (xx. 19—23) relates that our Lord gave this commission to His Apostles to "remit sins" on the day of His resurrection. "Then the same day at evening . . . came Jesus and saith, Peace be unto you . . . *Then* said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you; As My Father," &c. S. John places it also distinctly before the appearance when S. Thomas was present—"But Thomas . . . was not with them when Jesus came," &c. Zwingli, following herein the Novatian censured by S. Pacian (see above, pp. 35, 36), in order to identify this commission with that in S. Matt. xxviii. 18, actually rends the latter half of S. John xx. 21, from the former, and inserts it, together with v. 22, 23, between S. Matt. xxviii. 18 and 19. Thus, whereas S. John relates the history, xx. 19—23, as one, Zwingli arbitrarily divides it into two: whereas S. John says that it took place before the occasion when S. Thomas was present, Zwingli places the latter part afterwards: and whereas S. John relates our Lord's words thus, v. 21, "*Then* said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you, as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you;" Zwingli says that they were said on two different occasions; that the words, "Then said Jesus unto them, Peace be unto you," were said on the day of the Resurrection, (*before* "He showed to them His Hands and His side," although S. John

says it was *after*,) and the latter part of the words forty days afterwards! Such is *his* "*history* of the Resurrection of the Lord!" (Hist. Dom. Res. Opp. t. 3. p. 395 and 400.)

As the absence of S. Thomas may, and has given rise to fresh cavil, S. Cyril's answer to cavillers in his day may be added, that "Christ gave the Holy Ghost, not to certain individuals, but to the whole of the disciples. Therefore, although not present, they received It, the bounty of the Giver not being contracted to those present, but extending to the whole band of the holy Apostles." He illustrates this by the analogy of Eldad and Medad, which was itself a type.

Blessed be God,
Which hath not turned away my prayer
Nor His Mercy from me.

